

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 5

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

THIRTIETH LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION

BY SENATORS COGHILL, Stevens, Giessel, Bishop, MacKinnon, Micciche, Hughes, Egan, Meyer, Kelly

Introduced: 5/1/17

Referred: Secretary's Desk

A RESOLUTION

1 **Recognizing the 150th anniversary of the purchase of Alaska.**

2 **BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE:**

3 **WHEREAS** it is important to recognize that Alaska has been inhabited by Native
4 peoples since the beginning of recorded history and possibly for thousands of years before
5 Alaska's discovery by Russia; and

6 **WHEREAS** Alaska was discovered by Russia in 1741, the first Russian colony was
7 established in 1784, and Alaska was a Russian colony for 83 years before its purchase by the
8 United States; and

9 **WHEREAS**, on March 30, 1867, United States Secretary of State William Seward
10 agreed to purchase Alaska from Russia for \$7,200,000, which amounts to \$123,000,000 in
11 today's dollars, and increased the size of the United States by almost 20 percent; and

12 **WHEREAS** Secretary Seward was convinced that Alaska was strategically located
13 and held abundant natural resources; and

14 **WHEREAS** Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner shepherded the treaty with
15 Russia through Senate ratification because he believed Alaska was critical to accessing Asian
16 markets; and

1 **WHEREAS** residents of Alaska were ignored by the federal government until the
2 United States Congress, on May 17, 1884, passed the First Organic Act, which created the
3 District of Alaska and provided for the appointment by the federal government of judges,
4 clerks, marshals, and limited government officials to administer the district under the laws of
5 the State of Oregon, and for the appointment by the President of the United States of four
6 commissioners to be located in Juneau, Sitka, Wrangell, and Unalaska; and

7 **WHEREAS**, in 1880, the first big gold strike near Juneau started a migration of
8 people to Alaska, and subsequent gold discoveries near Nome in 1898 and in the Interior in
9 1902 brought people inland, resulting in the settlement of population centers in places such as
10 Manley Hot Springs and Fairbanks; and

11 **WHEREAS** Fairbanks, because of its large commercial gold mining operations, grew
12 to become the largest city in Alaska, after Nome, and continued to prosper for many years,
13 with jobs, a growing middle class, churches, schools, and cultural opportunities; and

14 **WHEREAS**, in 1901, Lieutenant Billy Mitchell, a young army lieutenant in the
15 Signal Corps, was sent to Alaska to supervise the construction of a telegraph line from Valdez
16 to Eagle, near where the Yukon River flows into Alaska from Canada, and, although building
17 a 1,500-mile telegraph line across the rugged wilderness and two major mountain ranges was
18 no simple feat, on June 27, 1903, he personally completed the line's last connection; and

19 **WHEREAS** the Alaska Native Allotment Act of 1906, enacted on May 17, 1906,
20 permitted individual Alaska Natives to acquire title to up to 160 acres of land in a manner
21 similar to that afforded to Native Americans; and

22 **WHEREAS** the Second Organic Act of 1912 made Alaska a territory of the United
23 States with an elected legislature; and

24 **WHEREAS**, although the territory of Alaska gained representation in the federal
25 government through a congressional delegate, the federal government retained much control
26 over the laws in Alaska regarding fishing, hunting, and natural resource management, and the
27 President of the United States appointed the governor; and

28 **WHEREAS**, on March 12, 1914, the United States Congress passed the Alaska
29 Railroad Act and funded a project to build a railroad of not longer than 1,000 miles to connect
30 "one or more of the open Pacific Ocean harbors on the southern coast of Alaska with the
31 navigable waters in the interior of Alaska"; and

1 **WHEREAS**, in 1915, the United States Congress reserved approximately 268,800
2 acres of land for the support of a territorial agricultural college and school of mines to be
3 established by the Alaska Territorial Legislature; the land available for selection included
4 every surveyed and unclaimed section 33 parcel, with 640 acres a section in each township
5 between, generally, Fairbanks and the foothills of the Alaska Range; because of the incredibly
6 slow pace of federal land surveys, except for 2,250 acres granted for the University of Alaska
7 Fairbanks campus, the Territory of Alaska received less than 9,000 acres, or about three
8 percent of the original entitlement from the 1915 land grant before the Act was extinguished
9 at statehood; and

10 **WHEREAS**, in 1916, James Wickersham, Alaska's delegate to Congress, proposed
11 the first bill for Alaska statehood; and

12 **WHEREAS** the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920 allowed the federal government to
13 retain mineral rights for coal, oil, gas, and other hydrocarbons on federal land and to share
14 royalties from those leases with the states; and

15 **WHEREAS**, in 1929, the United States Congress granted an additional 100,000 acres
16 of land to the Territory of Alaska for the exclusive use and benefit of the Alaska Agricultural
17 College and School of Mines, which allowed for the selection of parcels of land throughout
18 the state, as long as they were surveyed, unappropriated, and unreserved; the University of
19 Alaska is still entitled to 960 acres from the 1929 land grant; and

20 **WHEREAS**, in 1935, General Billy Mitchell testified before the United States House
21 of Representatives and its Committee on Military Affairs to plead with the United States
22 Congress to recognize the strategic importance of Alaska, saying, "I believe that in the future,
23 whoever holds Alaska will hold the world. I think it is the most important strategic place in
24 the world"; and

25 **WHEREAS**, in 1935, as part of the New Deal resettlement plan and in response to the
26 Great Depression, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration created an experimental
27 farming community known as the Matanuska Valley Colony; and

28 **WHEREAS** the 1942 invasion by Japan of Attu and Kiska islands on the Aleutian
29 chain resulted in significant investment in Alaska for military operations during World War
30 II; and

31 **WHEREAS**, on February 11, 1942, the United States Congress and President

1 Franklin Delano Roosevelt authorized the United States Army to begin construction of the
2 Alaska Highway for the purpose of defending and resupplying World War II airfields in
3 Fairbanks and along the coast of Alaska; construction of the 1,600-mile pioneer road from
4 Dawson Creek to Delta Junction began in March 1942 and was completed on November 20,
5 1942; wartime restrictions on road use were lifted in 1948; and

6 **WHEREAS**, because of the construction of military installations in Alaska, the
7 population of Alaska nearly doubled from 1940 to 1950; and

8 **WHEREAS**, in 1946, a referendum in favor of statehood passed by a margin of three
9 to two, and an ad hoc group of citizens formed the Alaska Statehood Association to lobby the
10 United States Congress for statehood; and

11 **WHEREAS** bills for statehood repeatedly failed to pass the United States Congress;
12 in April 1948, a bill introduced by Delegate Bob Bartlett died in the Rules Committee; in
13 1950, a bill passed the United States House of Representatives by a vote of 186-146 but failed
14 to pass the United States Senate; and, in 1951 and 1952, statehood bills also failed to pass the
15 United States Senate; and

16 **WHEREAS**, in the early 1950s, Alaskans believed that drafting a constitution before
17 the United States Congress approved statehood would jeopardize Congressional approval;
18 however, after many failed efforts to pass statehood bills, Alaskans decided to take history
19 into their own hands; and

20 **WHEREAS**, on November 8, 1955, 55 delegates elected from all over the state
21 gathered in Fairbanks to begin drafting a constitution, and Bill Egan was chosen as the
22 convention's presiding officer; and

23 **WHEREAS**, when the United States Congress reconvened in January 1958, President
24 Dwight D. Eisenhower fully endorsed Alaska statehood; the United States House of
25 Representatives passed the statehood bill by a vote of 210-166, and the United States Senate
26 passed the House version by a vote of 64-20; and

27 **WHEREAS**, on July 7, 1958, President Eisenhower signed the Alaska Statehood Act,
28 and, in August of 1958, Alaskans voted to approve the terms of statehood, establishing a
29 compact between the United States Congress and the people of Alaska; and

30 **WHEREAS**, on January 3, 1959, Alaska became the 49th state of the United States of
31 America; and

1 **WHEREAS** Alaskans who led the battle for statehood thought becoming a state
2 would free Alaska from federal control; however, economic freedom moved slowly, with
3 much federal overreach preventing the development of a diverse economy based on the rich
4 natural resources available in the state; and

5 **WHEREAS**, in 1968, Atlantic Richfield Company discovered the largest oil field in
6 United States history at Prudhoe Bay, 250 miles north of the Arctic Circle; and

7 **WHEREAS**, in 1971, President Richard M. Nixon signed the Alaska Native Claims
8 Settlement Act, which paved the way for the construction of the Trans Alaska Pipeline
9 System and awarded 44,000,000 acres and nearly \$1,000,000,000 to newly established Native
10 Regional and Village Corporations; and

11 **WHEREAS**, in 1973, Vice-President Spiro Agnew broke a tie in the United States
12 Senate on a vote to approve the construction of the Trans Alaska Pipeline System; and

13 **WHEREAS**, in 1976, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management
14 Act was passed to extend control of United States water out to 200 nautical miles from shore,
15 to phase out foreign fishing activities within that zone, prevent overfishing, allow overfished
16 stocks to recover, and conserve and manage fisheries resources; and

17 **WHEREAS**, in 1976, the Constitution of the State of Alaska was amended to direct a
18 portion of oil revenue to the permanent fund; and

19 **WHEREAS**, on June 20, 1977, the first barrel of Prudhoe Bay oil flowed through the
20 Trans Alaska Pipeline System; and

21 **WHEREAS** the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act passed the United
22 States Congress in November 1980 and was signed into law December 2, 1980; that Act
23 provided varying degrees of special protection to over 157,000,000 acres of land, including
24 new national park land, additional acreage to the National Wildlife Refuge System,
25 designation of 25 wild and scenic rivers, national forests, and other benefits to the United
26 States in exchange for the "No More" clause; and

27 **WHEREAS**, in 1995, the United States Congress passed H.R. 2491, the fiscal year
28 1996 budget reconciliation bill, with provisions to open the 1002 area of the Arctic National
29 Wildlife Refuge to energy development, but President Bill Clinton vetoed the measure; and

30 **WHEREAS**, on April 4, 2017, President Donald Trump signed H.J.R. 69, nullifying
31 the final rule of the decision of the United States Department of the Interior relating to "Non-

1 Subsistence Take of Wildlife, and Public Participation and Closure Procedures, on National
2 Wildlife Refuges in Alaska"; and

3 **WHEREAS** the state is still largely funded by oil revenue, and challenges and
4 opportunities await Alaskans as the military presence in the state increases and the nation
5 recognizes the state's importance;

6 **BE IT RESOLVED** that the Senate celebrates the 150th anniversary of the historic
7 purchase of Alaska and encourages the federal government to recognize the significant
8 contributions Alaska has made and will continue to make to the energy needs, economic
9 stability, and national security of the United States; and be it

10 **FURTHER RESOLVED** that Alaska, the lone Arctic state, will have a beautiful and
11 prosperous future if allowed the freedom to pursue it.