

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 32

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

EIGHTEENTH LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION

BY THE HOUSE RULES COMMITTEE BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

Introduced: 3/1/93

Referred: Health, Education & Social Services

A RESOLUTION

1 **Urging the federal government to recognize the dire water and sanitation**
2 **conditions in rural Alaska and to become a full partner with this state in**
3 **improving this health-threatening situation.**

4 **BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:**

5 **WHEREAS** Alaskans living in over 135 rural communities throughout the state have
6 **substandard and inadequate water and sewer facilities; and**

7 **WHEREAS** this lack of basic facilities results in many of these rural Alaskans having
8 **to drink untreated water from ponds, creeks, or rivers and having to use a bucket as a toilet**
9 **or an outhouse as a bathroom facility; and**

10 **WHEREAS** this lack of basic facilities often results in uncontained sewage pooling
11 **in close vicinity to homes, in liquid wastes leaching into the waters used for drinking, and in**
12 **exposing children to raw sewage in their play areas; and**

13 **WHEREAS** this lack of basic facilities is causing a critical human health and safety
14 **crisis in rural Alaska as evidenced by an alarmingly high incidence of potentially life-**
15 **threatening diseases, such as hepatitis A and meningitis; and**

16 **WHEREAS** Alaska's rural population is projected to double by the year 2010, further

1 compounding this health crisis and exposing many rural residents to diseases that would be
2 preventable with basic sanitation facilities; and

3 **WHEREAS** rural Alaska has a history of cycles of waterborne disease epidemics
4 stemming from unsafe water and sanitation systems, and state epidemiologists report hepatitis
5 A is currently beginning another new cycle of that disease; and

6 **WHEREAS** the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development
7 continues to design and build homes in rural Alaska without adequate provision for safe
8 sewage disposal or in-home drinking water; and

9 **WHEREAS** the commissioner of the Alaska Department of Environmental
10 Conservation established the Alaska Sanitation Task Force, consisting of 27 federal, state,
11 Native, and regional organizations, to analyze these important issues and provide
12 recommendations for action; and

13 **WHEREAS** the implementation of the recommendations of the Alaska Sanitation Task
14 Force involves the joint commitment of the state, local and federal governments to improve
15 the living standards, public health, and quality of life of rural Alaskans; and

16 **WHEREAS** the governor has directed the commissioner of the Alaska Department of
17 Environmental Conservation and commissioners of other affected state departments to use their
18 best efforts to utilize available resources to address this critical health problem; and

19 **WHEREAS** the Alaska State Legislature recognizes the important work done by the
20 Alaska Sanitation Task Force and urges early implementation of the task force's findings and
21 recommendations by the state government in partnership with the federal government, local
22 government, Native regional corporations, and others to address these challenges; and

23 **WHEREAS** this state effort will not be successful without the commitment of the
24 federal government to meet its responsibilities and obligations to these rural residents, many
25 of whom are Alaska Natives; and

26 **WHEREAS** the federal government, through the United States Environmental
27 Protection Agency, has the capacity to assist in correcting the sanitation conditions in rural
28 Alaska as exemplified by its ongoing efforts in other areas of the country such as the
29 American Southwest Colonias where border town communities are receiving assistance in
30 establishing basic water and sewage facilities; and

31 **WHEREAS** a national effort similar to that currently being undertaken in the
32 American Southwest Colonias is necessary if residents in rural Alaska are to no longer be

1 consigned to substandard sanitation conditions.

2 **BE IT RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature respectfully requests the
3 President of the United States to direct the administrator of the United States Environmental
4 Protection Agency to join in a partnership with the State of Alaska to finance and implement
5 a long-term, comprehensive effort to improve sanitation conditions in rural Alaska; and be it

6 **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature respectfully requests the
7 President of the United States to ask the Environmental Protection Agency, the United States
8 Department of Housing and Urban Development, the United States Department of Health and
9 Human Services, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the United States Department of Education, the
10 United States Department of Labor, and the United States Department of Transportation to
11 commit available finances and resources necessary to improve the water and sanitation
12 conditions in rural Alaska by implementing the recommendations of the Alaska Sanitation
13 Task Force.

14 **COPIES** of this resolution shall be sent to the Honorable Bill Clinton, President of the
15 United States, and to the Honorable Ted Stevens and the Honorable Frank Murkowski, United
16 States Senators, and the Honorable Don Young, United States Representative, members of the
17 Alaska delegation in Congress.