

HCR

15

Representative Mary Kapsner

State Capitol • Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182
Phone: (907) 465-4942 • Fax: (907) 465-4589
E-Mail: Representative_Mary_Kapsner@legis.state.ak.us

House District 38
Yukon Kuskokwim Delta

Akiachak
Akiak
Atmautluak
Bethel
Chefnak
Eek
Goodnews Bay
Kasigluk
Kipruk
Kongiganak
Kwethluk
Kwigillingok
Lower Kalskag
Mekoryuk
Napakiak
Napaskiak
Newtok
Nightmute
Nunapitchuk
Oscarville
Platinum
Quinhagak
Toksook Bay
Tuluksak
Tununak
Tuntutuliak
Upper Kalskag

MEMORANDUM

TO: Representative Peggy Wilson, Chair
House Health, Education and Social Services Committee

FROM: Representative Mary Kapsner

DATE: April 23, 2003

RE: Scheduling Request – Alaska History Resolution (HCR 19)

I respectfully request consideration of calendaring of the attached resolution requesting the State Board of Education to adopt regulations requiring the equivalent of at least one semester of Alaska history prior to graduation from high school.

Over the past two years interest in requiring Alaska students to learn about our state's history has grown. Alaskans speak with pride about being from this great state, but many lack a base of knowledge about our history, how we got to this point in time, and why aspects of our government and social structures are different. Many Alaskans, in fact, were educated in other states where they took that state's history and express surprise that Alaska doesn't have a similar requirement.

Support across Alaska has been tremendous. It has come from diverse areas--from the education community, civic leaders, historical societies, the editorial boards of numerous newspapers, and many individual Alaskans. Recognizing the fiscal challenges facing every school district, The Humanities Forum has led a successful effort in obtaining funding needed for curriculum development and training.

Nearly 2/3 of the last legislature joined in co-sponsoring legislation aimed at improving this circumstance by requiring high school students to have some basic knowledge of Alaska history and government. It passed the House without opposition, but was stalled in a Senate committee. During the interim we worked with the leadership of the Alaska Humanities Forum in bringing the issue to the attention of the State Board of Education. The board developed a committee to consider the issue and was mid-process at the time the Governor appointed new board members. This resolution requests the newly appointed State Board of Education to continue the work begun on this issue.

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House Concurrent Resolution 19 - Alaska History Curriculum Sponsor Statement

Although we are a very young state, we are a land with a rich history. Our economy is fueled by resource development, in our recent history predominantly by oil, at various times in the past by fisheries, fur, timber, and mining. We are facing pressing issues as we plan for our future, and we need an electorate that understands the context of these issues at more than a 4th or 6th grade level.

House Concurrent Resolution 19 calls upon the State Board of Education to require that high school students to complete the equivalent of a semester course in Alaska History before graduation. Understanding our history is fundamental to being an informed and effective participant in state and local affairs. While many school districts in Alaska do offer and/or require a high school level Alaska History course, the legislature should request that the State Board of Education see that every child receives a quality education in this critical subject.

Groups across Alaska, from educators to economists, have been active in advocating the teaching of Alaska history to our students. In addition to individual Alaskans who have spoken out in support of Alaska History over the past two years, resolutions or letters came from Commonwealth North, the Alaska Humanities Forum, The Association of School Boards, the Association of School Administrators, NEA, the Alaska Geographic Alliance, the Alaska Historical Society, the Alaska Historic Commission, the Alaska Historic Preservation Office, the Alaska Municipal League, AFN, First Alaskans Institute, Bridge Builders, Palmer Historic Society, the Municipality of Anchorage, the Anchorage School Board, and numerous other municipalities around the state.

Senator Ted Stevens and the Alaska Humanities Forum have succeeded in securing funding for the development of a high school level Alaska History curriculum that could be made available to school districts.

Alaskans everywhere pride themselves simply in being Alaskan. We tell ourselves that our children are our most valuable resources, that they will be the leaders of tomorrow. As we strive to prepare them for the future, the educational foundation we provide should include an understanding of our state's history.

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HCR 19 – Alaska History Curriculum Sponsor Statement

House Concurrent Resolution 19 calls upon the State Board of Education to require high school students complete the equivalent of a semester course in Alaska History before graduation.

Understanding our history is fundamental to being an informed and effective participant in state and local affairs. While many school districts in Alaska do offer and/or require a high school level Alaska History course, many do not. There is a compelling interest in having our students learn about our state's history as they begin their lives as responsible citizens of our state. As many supporters of an Alaska history high school requirement have noted, the better educated today's young people are concerning our history, the better equipped they will be to make decisions in the future that will become part of our history.

The State Board of Education began the work necessary to consider the proposition of requiring Alaska History as a part of high school curriculum this past year. This resolution reinforces the Legislature's interest in the new board continuing that work.

Over the past three years support for requiring Alaska History at the high school level has been tremendous. Groups from educators to economists have been active in advocacy efforts. The diversity of support says a lot: Commonwealth North, the Alaska Humanities Forum, the Association of School Boards, the Association of School Administrators, NEA-Alaska, the Alaska Geographic Alliance, the Alaska Historical Society, the Alaska Historic Commission, the Alaska Historic Preservation Office, the Alaska Municipal League, AFN, First Alaskans Institute, Bridge Builders, Palmer Historic Society, the Municipality of Anchorage, the Anchorage School Board, and numerous other municipalities around the State.

Senator Ted Stevens and the Alaska Humanities Forum have succeeded in securing funding for the development of a standards-based high school level Alaska History curriculum that would be made available to school districts. The effort placed on relieving the financial burden to school districts who do not presently have an Alaska History curriculum makes this a truly win/win proposition. Districts will be able to maintain a high level of local control in terms of curriculum content and deciding whether students should take Alaska History as a stand alone course or as components of other course requirements—including social studies, language arts and math.

Alaskans everywhere pride themselves simply in being Alaskan. We tell ourselves that our children are our most valuable resources, that they will be the leaders of tomorrow. As we strive to prepare them for the future, the educational foundation they receive should include an understanding of our state's history.



Resolution of the State Board of Education & Early Development

**Supporting the Alaska Humanities Forum Request For Federal Funding
To Enhance The Teaching and Learning of Alaska History and Culture**

Resolution 05-2002

Whereas, the State of Board of Education & Early Development has adopted a mission for schools that promises "that all students succeed in their education and work, shape worthwhile and satisfying lives for themselves, exemplify the best values of society, and are effective in improving the character and quality of the world about them"; and

Whereas, the State Board has set out in 4 AAC 04.020 that graduating seniors need to possess certain skills and qualities, including being "responsible citizens"; and

Whereas, the State Board in February 2002 went on record expressing its "strong support for mandating a knowledge of Alaska's history for our high school graduates"; and

Whereas, many young Alaskans lack sufficient knowledge of the history and cultures of our state; and

Whereas, the State Board is on record as supporting the convening of a widely diverse group of Alaskans, including community leaders, teachers, administrators, parents, university professors and historians to develop standards and a curriculum of what students should know about Alaska history and our state's cultures; and

Whereas, the Alaska Humanities Forum is a highly regarded organization known for its excellent work and high quality products that possesses a deep commitment to Alaska, its children and its future; so

Therefore, Be It Resolved that the State Board of Education & Early Development strongly supports the request of the Alaska Humanities Forum for federal funds to develop, produce and distribute standards, curriculum materials and lesson plans for the teaching and learning of Alaska history and culture in the schools of Alaska.

Chair, State Board of Education & Early Development

November 22, 2002



Some educators believe Alaska history should be a mandatory class, but other people say it should remain optional.

Putting Alaska history into the school books

Iris Keogh

Anchorage, Alaska, Sept. 26 - Should high school students be given one more requirement, or is there another way to incorporate Alaska history into the school curriculum? That's one of the issues facing the state Board of Education and Early Development.

Who was Alaska's first governor?

When did Alaska become a state?

How and when did the Alaska Permanent Fund start?

These are all questions on Alaska history -- questions, some say, that many Alaskan students can't answer.

Ira Perman is a member of a task force for the teaching of Alaska history and cultural studies. He and others think the Board of Education should require that all 52 school districts statewide teach a semester course in Alaska history.

because they don't have the background of information, and just the issue of the permanent fund, how to solve the state's fiscal problems, how we got to where we are."

Even though Comeau believes Alaska history should be required, she says how the subject is taught should be a local decision. What works in Anchorage may not work in the Bush.

"I think it's critical," says state Commissioner of Education Shirley Holloway. "I think the state board is very supportive of that. They just want to be sensitive to the differences that we have in this state, in terms of the number of youngsters in schools and the number of teachers that are available to teach those youngsters."

Megan Coffland, a senior at Sitka High School and the student advisor to the board, thinks the concept of students learning about their state is a great idea, but making the subject a requirement is not.

"They won't take it seriously," she says. "It's just one more requirement to get out of the way. It's one more frustration, and you don't want something that important to be a frustration to students."

"People don't know, for example, why the Egan Center is named... after who?" Perman says.

Just one of the questions many educators hope students can answer.

For the record, the Egan Civic and Convention Center was named for Bill Egan, who served as Alaska's first governor from 1959 to 1966, and again from 1970 to 1974. Alaska became a state in 1959. The Alaska Permanent Fund was first suggested by Gov. Jay Hammond, and created by Alaska voters in 1976 with an amendment to the state constitution. The first checks were sent out in 1982.



Wednesday, January 23, 2002

Learning history is an investment in the future

Frontiersman editorial board

The Legislature is once again considering a bill that would require high school students to pass an Alaska history class to earn a diploma. We throw our full support behind this plan.

Sometimes classes are designed to get students excited about a topic, to inspire them to learn more. Others offer basic, day-to-day knowledge students will need after they graduate. Instruction in Alaska's history addresses both of these.

A good class, taught by the right teacher, could help students to understand the relevance of years gone by, to observe in their own communities the effects of those years and, in turn, could inspire them to enjoy history as a general subject.

But more importantly, information about how we all arrived in Alaska and how we formed our government and established our relationships with each other and with the rest of the world is critical to decisions we make everyday. Whether it is the ongoing debate over subsistence and its related struggle of rural versus urban communities or the issue of where state money comes from and how it is spent, we could all stand to take a look back over the decades prior to today.

So far, dozens of legislators around the state have signed on as co-sponsors of the Alaska history requirement bill, joining forces with sponsor Rep. Mary Kapsner,

D-Juneau.

Lt. Gov. Fran Ulmer, the state Tolerance Commission and the Anchorage School Board have all voiced their support of the bill.

We encourage our legislators and local school board to take a similar stance. This is a chance to not only help our students be better educated about their own state, but also to possibly improve everything from race relations to budget decisions in years to come as these

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students become the business and government leaders of Alaska.

But all this grand talk of looking back at our history to improve our future won't mean a thing if we don't have the money to make it happen.

Too often federal and state laws pile new requirements onto our educators but then don't back it up with adequate budget increases. We don't want to see everyone cheer for the Alaska history class requirement only to have it come back to our local schools as another unfunded mandate.

Look at it as an investment. The better educated today's youth are about Alaska's history, the better equipped they will be in the future to make decisions that will become a part of Alaska's history. And every student becomes more interested in Alaska history and government is one more person who will become an interested voter, an involved citizen and, possibly, a dedicated legislator.

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OUR VIEW

History Lesson

*Alaska students need it;
State House gets to work*

Stirring to life in the Alaska Legislature is a bill that shows great long-term promise for helping bridge the state's disturbing urban-rural divide. HB 171 would require graduating Alaska students to pass a high school class in Alaska history, including a Native studies component. The bill cleared the House Education Committee on Wednesday. The next committee in line to consider the bill waived any action on it, a sure sign the bill is gathering momentum. Now it's awaiting action in the House Finance Committee. Along the way, HB 171 has picked up a bipartisan list of 18 cosponsors, just three short of the 21 votes needed for passage when a bill comes to the House floor.

The bill's preamble makes a compelling case for the measure:

“An education rich in history and government is vital to the development of a representative democracy and a civil society. Knowledge of a person's own state history and government is fundamental to informed and effective participation in state and local affairs. ... An educated Alaska populace with a full appreciation for the history of Alaska will make better decisions for the good of all Alaska citizens.”

*Extra urgency
for the Alaska
history
requirement
comes from a
simple fact of
Alaska
geography.*

Requiring Alaska history for high school graduation would be a good idea under any circumstances. After all, 22 other states have a similar law. But extra urgency for the Alaska history requirement comes from a simple fact of Alaska geography. The state's rural areas, where most of the Alaska Native population lives, are so distant and isolated that few urban Alaskans ever go there. That physical gulf creates a chasm of misunderstanding about the unique needs of rural Alaska, especially about the many different Native cultures found there.

So far, no House member has objected to the proposed Alaska history requirement. The only hesitant voice comes from Anchorage Rep. Con Bunde, who opposes the provision that opens a possible exemption from the requirement for special education students.

We hope the measure won't get sidetracked over that important, but largely technical, issue. Alaska can't start soon enough to give its graduating students the fundamental grounding they need to be informed, caring citizens.



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Anchorage Daily News

B-6 Friday, April 27, 2001

Alaska State History— Let's Teach It Now!

In a recent public appearance it became painfully clear that Alaska's generation of the future knows little about Alaska's past.

I asked a group of high school grads what they knew about Pearl Harbor Day. I saw puzzled looks and blank stares on the faces of the young audience.

When told that bombing Pearl Harbor started WW II for the U.S. and that Alaska was also bombed during that war, the looks turned to doubt. Playing to my obvious strength I asked if anybody knew that when Alaska was purchased from Russia aboriginal inhabitants were to receive certain status, according to the agreement signed by U.S. Secretary of State William H. Seward and Baron Eduard de Stoeckl (for Alexander II of Russia). (And who were they, anyway?) Or further, that the Baron had to actually bribe certain members of both houses of Congress to secure the required number of votes to complete the purchase.

I later wondered if any high school student had ever thought about the land bridge, or had read about the European explorers who came to the Great Land, the first one from Denmark.

Beyond their own culture, are students aware of the several distinct cultures that make up the population of Alaska? Their customs, tools, modes of transportation and trade; religious observation or geographic ranges and uses of the land?

In the main, they knew nothing of these things. Worse, they don't really care. They're not relevant today, they say. If not relevant, it is because adults have not made them relevant. The kids cannot be faulted.

Can't We All Just Get Along?

Understanding begins with knowledge. Beware that understanding doesn't always beget appreciation or tolerance.

Such things come only with time. But, begin with knowledge.

We support the proposition that a passing grade in Alaska history should be requisite to secondary school graduation. That's the easy part. Coming up with a suitable textbook, goals and objectives and course work will not be easy to do during the first few years. Just defining Alaska history will be daunting enough. Shall we study Alaska "State" (modern) history? Shall we go back further to Alaska ancient history? Much of that history is recorded in the oral tradition of Alaska's First Peoples.

How Broad A Viewpoint?

The twig in the pathway over which we must not trip while seeking knowledge is this: The course must not be overtaken by a few advocates of only one or limited experiential histories. To suppose that Alaska's history began with the list of European explorers and exploiters who nearly extinguished Native cultures in Alaska would be just as wrong as to suppose that Europeans (white people) had nothing positive to offer. Likewise would it be counterproductive to wallow through centuries of hate and self-pity.

Alaska's Grand Social Experiment

And finally, a chapter must be included to cover the period 1970 to the present. It would be dedicated to the anthropology and sociology of financially disadvantaged landholders when they become wealthy shareholders. Ergo, a current case history and analysis of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act belongs in a good history of Alaska. It has changed the Great Land forever and ever, and for ages unto ages.

—Vern C. McCorkle

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Vern C. McCorkle, Publisher

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501 W. Northern Lights Boulevard, Suite 100
Anchorage, Alaska 99503
(907) 276-1373

Outside Anchorage: 1-800-770-1373

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Alaskans need knowledge of past

By Jon Kumin
For the Journal

Alaska is grappling with a host of serious issues. They share a common characteristic: Successful resolution must be based on understanding the underlying circumstances. Whether it's subsistence, the fiscal gap or revitalizing the Alaska salmon industry, solutions are best crafted from a firm understanding of the past.

In September 2000 Commonwealth North completed a major study of urban-rural issues. One of the six study recommendations was to seek the meaningful teaching of Alaska history in all Alaska high schools. This recommendation was based on extensive testimony during the study that effective decisions about Alaska's future must be based on a better understanding of our common past.

A follow-up study by Commonwealth North researched the issues affecting such a course, reaching out to groups that included teachers, school administrators, school boards and historians. Wide support was heard for the concept.

Much progress has been made since. The Anchorage School Board voted to incorporate this requirement and has started carefully assembling the appropriate curriculum materials. The Alaska

House of Representatives showed it understood the importance of the topic by unanimously passing House Bill 171, which mandates the teaching of Alaska history in Alaska high schools. The bill now rests in the Senate.

As the debate continues, issues have arisen. The Senate has the opportunity to improve the bill. Several areas must be addressed.

A common curriculum

One common unifying Alaska history course is needed to impart a shared understanding of Alaska's past. The current bill leaves each of the 53 state school districts to develop its own Alaska history course. There is no oversight body developing a curriculum or set of academic standards.

The Department of Education and Early Development should develop a curriculum standard that can be used as a basis for adoption statewide. The good work started by the Anchorage School District can be melded into this effort.

The course must be accurate and balanced, including the study of Alaska's government, civics,

WEALTHBUILDERS



Kumin

geography and economy. The history and ways of life of Alaska's many peoples, both indigenous and more recent arrivals should be covered along with topics like the campaign for statehood, mining, the pipeline, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, the Permanent Fund, federal policies and major public policy issues of today.

Alaska's history is unlike any other. Much of our history is so recent that some who created it are still with us. We have a fantastic opportunity to pass our history on to young people directly from those who made it. We still have, for example, a handful of the people who wrote our state's constitution, which is widely respected as one of the best in the United States.

Unfunded mandates

The Fairbanks North Star Borough School District and other districts reasonably bridle at the imposition of academic requirements without the accompanying implementation funds. Funding from the state will be hard to come by, perhaps for years to come. Yet, civic backers of the bill are putting their money where their mouths are.

The Alaska Humanities Forum, the First Alaskans Institute, National Education Association - Alaska and others have pledged to provide money to develop the course, create materials and train teachers. Help from Washington, D.C., is also available.

How to make room for Alaska history should be a local decision. Many ways exist to add Alaska history to a district's curriculum. Specifics will depend on the priorities of each community.

Alaska history course has long-lasting value

Continued from Page 4

Districts may replace an elective course of lower priority. Some districts may choose to increase their students' graduation credit requirement; a one-semester course adds one-half credit. Some may choose to integrate the content into existing courses, such as threading the study of the Permanent Fund into an economics course.

What about Advanced Placement students?

This course must challenge those students. A rigorous and engaging course will have tremendous benefits. Students without an appreciation of the special nature of their state are more likely to leave it. Alaska history should be offered as an honors-level course for those students who respond to challenging curriculum.

Other questions and concerns will arise. It is important to remember that the long-term benefits of teaching a common Alaska history course far outweigh the short-term challenges. Our students need to learn their common

history. They need to know they have one. Otherwise Alaskans will continue down the path we have been treading. We will not understand who we are, how we came to be, and, most importantly, we will have a hard — perhaps impossible — time agreeing on what we should become.

We have an opportunity to impart a common Alaska history to the next generation of Alaskans.

We have an opportunity to impart a common Alaska history to the next generation of Alaskans. We have an obligation to tell an accurate and compelling story to our children so that we come together as Alaskans with a shared understanding of our past, a better understanding of our present and the prospect of a unified future. History will judge us poorly if we do not.

Jon Kumin is president of Kumin Associates Inc. Architects and Planners. He can be reached at 907-272-8833.

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db

• 6130 T-4th Floor
Anchorage, AK 99507
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Anchorage, AK 99508-0138

• Phone: (907) 562-5618
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NEA-ALASKA

Affiliated with the National Education Association

April 29, 2003

Representative Mary Kapsner
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol (MS 3100)
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Dear Representative Kapsner:

Thank you for inviting NEA-Alaska to reaffirm its support for legislation that would provide all of Alaska's high school graduates the opportunity to acquire knowledge of our state's history. We are pleased to reaffirm that support.

At our 2001 Delegate Assembly, NEA-Alaska members from all across the state voted to approve New Business Item 01-57. This New Business Item states in part, "NEA-Alaska shall encourage the Department of Education and Early Development to develop regulations providing (a) mandatory Alaskan History curriculum...throughout the State..." The delegates to our 2002 and 2003 Delegate Assembly continued their support for this concept.

NEA-Alaska supports the passage of HCR 19. This legislation falls within the spirit of our New Business Item. Speaking as an individual who attended school in another state, I can say that I was taught the history of that state. I have spoken with colleagues who came to Alaska from many other states, and they all had similar experiences of being required to learn about the history of the states where they attended school.

Most Alaskans came to this state from other states and from many foreign countries. It is shared experiences that make us all Alaskans. The shared experiences of our ancestors are our collective history. It is important for our children to be familiar with that shared experience, in other words, with our history. If we believe that a united Alaska is better than a fractured one, then we need to engage in activities that bring us together. Learning about our shared history is one such activity. For that reason, NEA-Alaska is pleased to be in support of HCR 19.

Sincerely,

Rich Kronberg
President

Alaska Association of School Administrators
LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

326 Fourth St., Suite 404 • Juneau, AK 99801-1101
Phone: (907) 586-9702 (800) 478-9702 • Fax: (907) 586-5879



April 30, 2003

The Honorable Mary Kapsner
State Capitol Building, Room 424
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Representative Kapsner:

Please accept this written testimony in comment on House Concurrent Resolution No. 19, urging implementation of an Alaska history curriculum in public schools.

As you are aware from prior correspondence, AASA can provide support for the concept but has a long-standing concern about unfunded mandated curriculum. In fact, every year our association endorses a resolution opposing unfunded mandates.

However, if the legislature would provide additional funds for a quality Alaska History requirement, including the costs of teacher training, teacher time, materials development and materials acquisition, there is support for its being a requirement. Districts already provide a variety of coursework in Alaska History, though not necessarily at the high school level.

In addition, because this resolution places the decision with the State Board of Education, we can support its passage. The appropriate forum for debate on the matter is with the State Board and we welcome that dialogue.

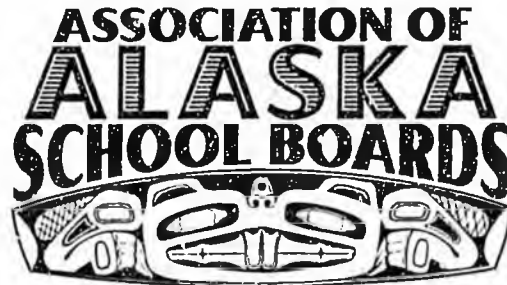
Please let me know if you would like additional information or further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Mary A. Francis'.

Mary A. Francis, Ph.D.
Executive Director

MF:klc



Advocates for Alaska's Youth

**Position Paper in Support of
HCR 14–Alaska History**

The Association of Alaska School Boards supports HCR 14, a resolution encouraging districts to include a review of Alaska history as part of their high school curriculum. The resolution also urges the Department of Education & Early Development to continue its fourth grade Alaska history curriculum.

The face of Alaska is changing demographically, economically, and socially. The speed of change makes it imperative for Alaska's citizens and leaders to have a sound understanding of the state's history. Knowing our history gives us all a context of where we came from and what we value about the diversity and richness of our state. That knowledge can help all Alaskans make decisions individually and collectively that will protect and enhance what we value both now and into the future.

An educated Alaskan populace, with a full appreciation for the history of the state in which they live, will make better decisions for the good of all its citizens. An understanding of our state's history will help us avoid mistakes of the past and will contribute to a prosperous, successful future for all Alaskans, no matter where they reside.

May 1, 2003