

2017-K395

Assembly Resolution No. 395

BY: M. of A. Finch

COMMEMORATING the 150th Anniversary of the
Purchase of the State of Alaska

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to remember those historic events which changed the course of this Nation, and to honor those leaders who demonstrate nationalism, and who stand strong in their convictions for the betterment of this country; and

WHEREAS, In the 19th Century, it was the belief of the American people, that it was their divine obligation to stretch the boundaries of this Great Nation westward to the Pacific coast; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is hereby proud to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the Purchase of Alaska; and

WHEREAS, Beginning in 1725, Russian Czar Peter the Great dispatched Vitus Bering, along with other traders to explore the Alaskan coast for its richness in natural resources and vast uninhabited land; and

WHEREAS, With its defeat in the Crimean War to Great Britain, Russia lacked the financial resources and military presence to support a major settlement along the Pacific coast of North America, having no more than 400 Russian settlers in the region; and

WHEREAS, In 1859, Russia offered to sell Alaska to the United States believing that the territory would be seized by Russia's greatest rival, Great Britain, by force if war broke out; and

WHEREAS, With the looming Civil War, the purchase of Alaska was delayed, but United States Secretary of State William H. Seward, originally from Auburn, New York, saw great potential in the purchase and quickly renewed the offer with Russia as soon as the war ended; and

WHEREAS, United States Secretary of State William Seward believed that Asia would become an important market for the country's export products, and expected that Alaska would serve as a base for American merchant ships; and

WHEREAS, On March 30, 1867, United States Secretary of State William H. Seward agreed to a proposal from Russian Minister Edouard de Stoeckle, on behalf of Russian Emperor Tsar Alexander II, to purchase Alaska for \$7.2 million, which is equivalent to approximately two cents per acre; and

WHEREAS, The United States Senate approved the treaty of purchase on April 9, 1867, by a vote of 37-2, and President Andrew Johnson signed the treaty on May 28th; the United States House of Representatives approved funding for the purchase of the Russian territory by a vote of 113-48 on July 14, 1868; and

WHEREAS, Alaska was officially transferred to the United States on October 18, 1967, at Sitka, on the Alaskan panhandle; residents in Alaska currently recognize and celebrate October 18th as Alaska Day; and

WHEREAS, Although the American public opinion of the purchase was mostly positive, there were a few critics who referred to Secretary of

State William Seward's decision as "Seward's Folly" or "Seward's Icebox," and newspaper editorials contended that taxpayer dollars were wasted on a "polar bear garden"; and

WHEREAS, For three decades the United States paid little attention to Alaska, which was governed by military rule until in 1896, when a major gold deposit was found in the Yukon; after this discovery, Alaska became the gateway to the Klondike gold area, and vindicated United States Secretary of State William H. Seward; and

WHEREAS, On January 3, 1959, President Eisenhower officially announced Alaska as the 49th state in the United States of America; and

WHEREAS, On May 13, 2017, the Seward House Museum in Auburn, New York, will celebrate the 150th Anniversary of Mr. Seward's fateful, eponymous folly: the acquisition of Alaska; and

WHEREAS, Members of the community as well as leaders from New York and Alaska will gather for the public unveiling of a new statue of Seward; just like Mr. Seward before it, the statue arrives in Auburn, New York, from the State Department in Washington before embarking on a western transcontinental railroad journey; and

WHEREAS, Shadowing Seward's own movements, the statue is ultimately bound for Juneau, Alaska, where it will thereafter grace the State House grounds; and

WHEREAS, Alaska has proved itself anything but a folly-the state played a major strategic importance in World War II and during the Cold War; it also provides numerous natural resources such as gold and oil, in addition to its economic and tourism benefits; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to hereby commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the purchase of Alaska, and to recognize Secretary of State William H. Seward for his wholehearted devotion to this state and nation and leadership in the face of opposition; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to Seward House Museum and current Executive Director, Billye Chabot.