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Address by Senator Strom Thurmond (D-SC) on Senate floor in opposition to H. R. 7999 (Alaskan statehood), 1958 June

Strom Thurmond

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MR. PRESIDENT:

The issue of Alaskan statehood is a complex one. It is a highly important one. It involves questions of national defense, conservation of resources, rights and duties of States, and the setting of a precedent for admission of additional non-contiguous territories to statehood in the Union.

I hope that we all will bear in mind, in considering this momentous question, the element of finality involved. Statehood once granted is irrevocable. The time to consider all aspects of the question is now, for once the statehood bill becomes law, it will be too late for this body to reconsider its action and to correct the situation by repealing its previously-enacted bill, as it can do in most other cases. In view of this finality which stares us in the face, I feel that we should all take a long and careful look before setting forth down this road of no return.

We have already heard and read a great deal of background information on the subject of Alaska. We have heard eloquent and glowing descriptions of the physical grandeur of the land. We have heard much of the character of the inhabitants, both the native Indians, Eskimos, and Aleuts and the newcomers who now make up a great majority of the population. We have heard detailed reports of the economic situation in Alaska. We have been given an abundance of statistics and figures of every sort. In short, we have been provided more than generously with background information, piled high, pressed down, still running over.
However, according to the Senate's sentiment as indicated in the press, this information has not been properly digested by the Members of this august body. I shall, therefore, review some of these facts and figures during the course of my address.

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Mr. President, I reaffirm my opposition to the admission of Alaska to statehood. I shall state the reasons for my position. I shall urge my fellow Senators to join with me in opposing this legislation, so fraught with danger to the future well-being of the United States of America.

First, I shall state, and then answer, the principal arguments—of which there appear to be seven—which have been advanced by the proponents of statehood.

Next, I shall deal—at some length, if I may—with the principal reasons why I feel that the admission of Alaska would be unwise.

Finally, I shall show why the admission of Alaska is unnecessary.

The advocates of statehood argue that the Alaskan economy is suffering and that this suffering is due to the disadvantages of territorial rule. They claim that statehood is necessary to bring economic progress to Alaska, even though, at the same time, they proclaim that Alaska is making great economic progress.

It is of course quite true that Alaska has made considerable economic progress—under territorial rule, it should be noted. The Honorable E. L. Bartlett, Alaska's Delegate in the House of Representatives and leading advocate of statehood, inserted in the March 3, 1958 Congressional Record an article from the magazine
Despite this great progress that has been made, it remains true that the Alaskan economy is in unsound condition. But what is it, specifically, that is wrong with it? It is this: Alaska suffers from high taxes and a high-price economy. And this is a situation which would be aggravated, rather than ameliorated, if Alaska were to be admitted to statehood. The people of Alaska, already over-taxed and burdened with an extremely high cost of living, simply cannot afford to pay the high cost of running an efficient State government.

Responsible opinion in Alaska is aware of the economic facts of life in Alaska. As a highly respected newspaper in the capital city of Juneau recently declared in an editorial:

"Alaska needs a ten-year moratorium on the statehood issue, which is a political football, and is being forced by intimidation on the property owners of Alaska. During this moratorium we can put our house in order to develop industry so that we can afford statehood at the end of four years."

It is asserted by the advocates of statehood that Alaska has a sufficiently large population to warrant statehood. It is estimated that the civilian population increased from 108,000 to 161,000 from 1950 to 1956, while the military population was estimated at between 45,000 and 50,000. Statehood advocates point out that 18 territories were admitted to statehood when their respective populations were less than 150,000.

What they do not say, however, is that the situation existing
in the United States today is not what it was when earlier States were admitted. The total population has grown to such an extent that 150,000 is now a much smaller proportion of the whole United States population. Although much of this great increase in population has occurred in the last four decades, as far back as 1912, when New Mexico and Arizona were admitted, they attained populations of 338,470 and 216,639, respectively, before being granted statehood.

In considering the size of the Alaskan population, it should also be borne in mind that the situation there is atypical, in that sixty-five percent of the workers are employed by the Federal government. Furthermore, because of the huge size of Alaska, the population per square mile is very much smaller than in even our most sparsely-settled states. The population density of Alaska is less than a third of that of Nevada, the least densely populated of our states.

As their third argument, the proponents of statehood claim that the United States has a legal and moral obligation to admit Alaska to the Union. This argument is based, in part, on the treaty between Russia and the United States by which Alaska was ceded. Article III of this treaty states as follows:

The inhabitants of the ceded Territory, according to their choice, reserving their natural allegiance, may return to Russia within 3 years, but if they should prefer to remain in the ceded Territory, they, with the exception of uncivilized native tribes, shall be admitted to the enjoyment of all the rights, advantages, and immunities of citizens of the United States, and shall be maintained and protected in the free enjoyment of their liberty, subject to such laws and regulations as the United States may, from time to time adopt in regard to aboriginal tribes of that country.

To claim that this treaty obligates the United States to admit the Territory of Alaska is a far-fetched and specious argument.
The treaty of cession obviously refers to the individual rights of the inhabitants, not to the right of statehood, since statehood could be conferred only through established procedures set forth in the Constitution and could not be conferred by treaty.

It is further claimed that the Supreme Court has settled the right of the Territories to ultimate statehood. This claim is presented as follows in the Senate Report:

Forty-five years ago the Alaska Organic Act was approved and Alaska became the incorporated Territory of Alaska as we know it today. All Territories that were ever incorporated have been admitted to statehood except Alaska and Hawaii, and only 3 Territories remained in incorporated status for longer than 45 years before admission. The Supreme Court of the United States has stated that an incorporated Territory is an inchoate State, and has uniformly considered that the incorporated status is an apprenticeship for statehood.

The Supreme Court, it is true, has attempted to state, or to imply, that there is an obligation to admit incorporated territories to statehood. As we have all been made painfully aware, however, the Court is not infallible. In attempting to make this determination of policy it was once again usurping the power of the legislative branch. This was an early example of what was later to become, in our own day, a confirmed habit on the part of the Court—that of legislating for the Congress.

In making their fourth point, the proponents of statehood have tried to advance their cause by loudly stating and re-stating the axiom that local problems can best be solved by local self-government. I certainly support that principle and am a firm believer in local self-government; but I must point out that statehood is not the only kind of local self-government which is possible.
The Alaska Organic Act of 1912 could be amended to give the territory as much local self-government as is consistent with the welfare of the territory and of the United States as a whole. But in pressing so single-mindedly for admission into the Union, statehood advocates in Alaska have been delinquent in seeking changes in the Organic Act which would provide more practical relief from their difficulties. This inescapably leads one to suspect that local self-government is not really a genuine issue here, but is only being used as a smokescreen. If it were local self-government that is primarily desired, it could easily be provided without a grant of statehood. In fact, especially when one considers how little self-government is being left to the States in the face of ever-increasing Federal encroachment, a non-statehood solution to Alaska's dilemma could provide that territory with a far greater degree of self-rule than the people there could obtain through statehood.

The point is, of course, that it is not really local self-government that the statehood advocates are after. What they seek is the very large and disproportionate degree of political power in national affairs which they would wield if Alaska were admitted as a State; for, although Alaska could actually obtain much more self-rule by choosing a non-statehood status, it is statehood alone which would provide Alaska with two Senators and a voting Representative in Congress.

A fifth argument advanced by statehood advocates is that Alaskan statehood would be helpful to our national defense by providing better machinery for getting local militia into action in case of invasion.
To this argument I shall only say that those who rely on it will be deceived by a false sense of security. The area of Alaska is so great and its civilian population so sparse that there seems little likelihood that local militia would be able to deal effectively with an enemy invasion of any substantial size. In fact, regarding the areas of Alaska most crucial to national security—the North, the West, and the Aleutian Islands—, the Administration asks for a proviso in the bill giving it permission to withdraw this land from State domain for national security purposes.

According to General Nathan Twining: "From the military point of view, the overall strategic concept for the defense of Alaska would remain unaffected by a grant of statehood."

In argument number six, it is claimed that the admission of Alaska would be a saving to the United States, in that many costs now borne by the Federal government would fall on the new State government.

This argument simply will not hold melted snow. The Alaskan economy could not support an efficient State government. It has been estimated that the cost of State government in Alaska might amount to as much as $217 per capita, which is more than the economy of the territory could bear. The Federal government, it would appear, would be obliged to give extraordinary aid to Alaska in order for the new State to remain solvent. I shall have more to say on this matter of Federal aid later in my remarks.

As their crowning argument, advocates of statehood claim that the admission of Alaska to statehood would prove to other nations of the world that we believe in territories becoming self-governing,
according to the principles of the United Nations Charter.

This is an irrelevant argument. In the first place, as I have already mentioned, and as I shall explain in some detail a little later, statehood is not the only form of self-government open to Alaska. The same purpose would be served by permitting the territory of Alaska a greater degree of self-government, either under territorial law, or by the establishment of a commonwealth type of government there. But in any event, we should not take a step that is unwise and unsound merely to please or impress foreign nations. Surely we should have learned that by now. Four years ago our Supreme Court rendered a decision dealing with a domestic issue largely on the basis of foreign propaganda considerations. The result has been turmoil and strife at home, which in turn has led to increased disrespect and enmity abroad.

The Alaska problem is not a colonial problem. The majority of the inhabitants are of American stock, most of them born in the States, or children of parents born in the States. The problem of Alaska is, therefore, strictly an internal United States problem. No nation which decides its internal affairs on a basis of what would be the most pleasing to the masses of Asia will keep the respect of any other nation in the world—not even of the masses of Asia.

Having now reviewed briefly the principal arguments advanced in favor of statehood for Alaska, I should like at this time to discuss what I feel are the main reasons why Alaska should not be admitted to statehood in this Union.

The first reason is this: By conferring statehood on a territory so thinly populated and so economically unstable as
Alaska, we, in effect, cheapen the priceless heritage of sovereign statehood. If Federal aid in extraordinary doses is necessary to keep Alaska solvent—and it would be needed, make no mistake about that--, it will be used as an excuse for increased Federal aid to all the States, with accompanying usurpation of State powers by the Federal government.

Now I realize full well that there are some members of this body who do not concern themselves with the preservation of the rights of the States. To them the States are little more than convenient electoral districts within an all-powerful monolithic national structure. They are far more interested in the attainment of an all-powerful central government and certain socio-political objectives in relation to which the doctrine of States' Rights often appears to them to be an annoying obstacle.

I do not believe, however, that this is true of most of the members of this body. I do not believe that the majority of Senators are ready to throw down and cast aside completely, once and for all, one of the two main principles which the Founding Fathers established to protect the individual liberties of the people. I believe that more and more people, including members of this Congress, are coming to realize that the principle of Separation of Powers, alone, is not enough to insure our individual liberty; that the principle of Separation of Powers cannot, in fact, stand by itself, but must be supported by the complementary pillar of States' Rights, in the manner that the Founders intended and prescribed. I believe that the people are at last beginning to see that, if their liberties are to be preserved, the trend toward ever greater centralization of power in the Federal government must somehow be
halted. I believe that this growing awareness of the necessity for action is shared by an increasing number of the members of this body.

I, therefore, urge my fellow Senator, Mr. President, those at least who are aware of the dangers of centralization and who are interested in stopping the flow of powers to Washington, not to support a step which would very shortly lead to greatly stepped-up Federal encroachment on what remaining powers the States have. This would definitely be a result of granting statehood to a territory economically unable to support an efficient State government. Vast amounts of Federal financial aid would be needed to enable the new State to maintain services which the Federal government maintains directly now; and this would be seized upon as an excuse for further Federal financial involvement in similar programs maintained in the other States, even where Federal aid was not needed. That acceptance by a State of Federal financial assistance leads sooner or later to Federal usurpation of State power, a truism which I consider unnecessary to explain.

My first reason, then, for opposing the admission of Alaska to statehood is that it would further weaken, to a very great extent, the already-weakened position of the States in our Federal system. My second main reason for opposing Alaskan statehood is that I believe that in admitting a non-contiguous territory to statehood we would be setting a very dangerous precedent. Statehood advocates have tried to brush off this objection as arbitrary, whimsical, silly and merely technical. So it would be, if Alaska were the only potentially admissible non-contiguous territory. But the
admission of Alaska will serve as precedent for the admission of Hawaii, which will in turn be cited as precedent for the admission of other, even more dissimilar, areas.

No, Mr. President, our objection to non-contiguity is not based on any mere arbitrary whim. There is no mere sentimentality at stake -- we are not urging that the United States keep its present geographical form simply because it looks pretty on the map that way. The entire concept and nature of the United States is at stake, and therefore the future of the United States also.

Three years ago in an article published in Collier's Magazine the distinguished junior Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. Monroney) expressed in a very clear fashion the importance of maintaining our concept of contiguity. I should like to quote him at some length:

"Unless the proposal is blocked or altered we will be on the highroad -- or high seas -- moving no one knows how swiftly toward changing the United States of America into the Associated States of the Western Hemisphere, or even the Associated States of the World. We will be leaving our concept of a closely knit union, every state contiguous to others, bonded by common heritages, common ideals, common standards of democracy, law and customs.

There is physical strength and symbolism in our land mass that stretches without break or enclave across the heart of North America. If we depart from the long-established rectangular land union that represents the United States on all maps of the world and bring in distant states, unavoidably they will be separated from existing states by the territory of other sovereign nations, or by international waters. It would be physically impossible to extend to them such neighborhood associations as now exist among our 48 states.

But far more than the physical shape of our country would be changed if we embark on this policy of offshore states. Senators and Representatives from them would stand for the needs and objectives and methods of the areas from which they come. Inevitably there would be serious conflicts of interest, and a few offshore members of Congress would, and someday probably would, block something of real concern to a majority of the present states. Island economies are, by their very nature, narrow and insular."
The debates in Congress indicate to me (I am still quoting the distinguished Senator from Oklahoma) indicate to me that many members have not thought the issue through to its ultimate possibilities, but regard it as a matter of immediate political expediency, of no great long-range importance one way or another. I think our two parties in their conventions have been much too casual about statehood.

I think that the Senator from Oklahoma put his finger on the vital matter at stake when he mentioned the "ultimate possibilities." As men charged with the responsibility for the future welfare of the United States, it is our responsibility to consider ultimate possibilities. We cannot consider the admission of Alaska, or of Hawaii, in a vacuum, closing our minds to the future. We must weigh carefully any and all considerations which are likely, or even reasonably possible, to flow out of our present actions.

And it should be emphasized that in mentioning these "ultimate possibilities," Senator Monroney was not bringing up any argumentum ad horrrendum. He was not simply raising nightmarish spectres which have no basis in fact. The possibilities to which he and I are referring as ultimate are not necessarily remote. In fact, once the principle of contiguity is broken by the admission of Alaska, they would no longer be possibilities but probabilities.

If Alaska is admitted to statehood in this Union, Hawaii will be admitted -- regardless of the entrenched and often-demonstrated power which is wielded there by International Communism. And if Alaska and Hawaii are admitted, is there anyone so naive as to think that the process will stop there? The precedent would have been set for the admission of offshore territories, territories totally different in their social, cultural, political and ethnic make-up from any part of the present area of the United States.

There is on Puerto Rico still a faction that would like to see
statehood. Admission of other offshore territories will greatly strengthen their hand in that island's political scene. And if Puerto Rico demands statehood, on what excuse do we deny it, once we have broken our contiguity rule by admitting Alaska and Hawaii?

Nor could we discriminate against Guam. That would have to be another State. Then would come American Samoa, to be followed by the Marshall Islands and Okinawa.

Furthermore, I see no reason why the process should stop with American possessions and trust territories. Suppose some Southeast Asian nation beset by political and economic difficulties should apply for American statehood. Would we deny them? On what basis? The argument might be raised that unless we granted the tottering nation statehood and incorporated it into our Union it would fall to Communist political and economic penetration. Even without that dilemma as a factor, there would always be that considerable bloc in both these Houses who would favor admitting the nation to statehood for fear that otherwise we might offend certain Asian political leaders or the Asian and African masses generally. Add to these the bloc of Senators and Representatives we would already have acquired from our new Pacific and Caribbean States, and the probabilities are that Cambodia, or Laos, or South Viet-nam, or whatever the nation might be, would be admitted to American statehood.

Now I wish to make it clear that I bear no ill-will towards the Cambodians, the Laotians, or the Vietnamese, just as I have no enmity toward the people of Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico. But I do not feel that Cambodia or the United States or the free world, in general, will benefit by the participation of two Cambodian Senators in the deliberations and voting of this body. I feel that such dilution of our legislative bodies would gravely weaken the United States and
reduce its capability to defend the rest of the free world, including Cambodia.

As Senator Monroney pointed out, "the French have tried making offshore possessions with widely differing peoples and interests an integral part of the government of continental France. The plan has been less than satisfactory. It has played a part in the instability and the inconsistency of the French parliamentary system."

The late Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler, long the president of Columbia University and Republican candidate for the Vice Presidency of the United States in 1912, devoted long and careful study to this matter of distant, non-contiguous States. Here is the conclusion he reached:

Under no circumstances should Alaska, Hawaii or Puerto Rico, or any other outlying island or territory, be admitted as a State in our federal Union. To do so, in my judgment, would mark the beginning of the end of the United States as we have known it and as it has become so familiar and so useful to the world. Our country now consists of a sound and compact area, bounded by Canada, by Mexico and by the two oceans. To add outlying territory hundreds or thousands of miles away with what certainly must be different interests from ours and very different background might easily mark, as I have said, the beginning of the end.

A country that is not American in its outlook, philosophy, character and make-up -- and here I refer not to Alaska but to these "ultimate possibilities" which Alaskan statehood would make probabilities -- and in the case of Hawaii, a foregone conclusion -- cannot be made American by proclamation or by Act of Congress. An Act of Congress may admit such a country to statehood in the American Union, but it cannot make it American, and, therefore, its admission would constitute a dilution of the basic character of the United States.

The development of the American character -- the character and
identity of the American people, of the American nation, of American institutions and civilization -- is the work of centuries. It did not come about overnight. Why, two centuries and a half had already gone into that development, from the time that this country had its beginnings in Virginia, before Alaska was even acquired from Imperial Russia?

I know that there are some who will attempt to brush all this aside. They will make the point that, despite this early development, this country, during the past half-century, has received millions of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe and elsewhere. They will point out that these immigrants were of very different ethnic and national backgrounds from those of the earlier settlers, that they were accustomed to very different institutions and sprang from very different cultures; and, yet, that these immigrants have nevertheless become just as good Americans as the descendants of the earliest Virginians.

The point, however, is this: These were people who were emigrating from their native lands to America; that is a very different proposition from a proposal which would have American statehood emigrating from this country to embrace the shores whence these people came. The immigrants who came here in late decades settled amongst established Americans, amidst established American institutions, surrounded by established American characteristics and ways of living, which they were bound to pick up and adopt as their own--thus indeed becoming Americans in fact as well as in technical citizenship. But the bestowal of American statehood on a foreign land will not make its inhabitants Americans in anything but name. You can take a native of Sicily, for example, and bring
him to America and settle him among us; and after several years he will pick up our language and customs, he will acquire a grasp of American institutions and culture, and he will adopt the ways of those about him. In short, while still retaining a sentimental attachment to his native land and some of his native characteristics, he will become an American.

It most certainly does not follow, however, that the granting of American statehood to Sicily would, or could, be a happy event either for the United States or for Sicily. The same is true in the case of, let us say, Greece. The mere fact that we have many citizens of Greek extraction or Greek birth who make fine Americans is absolutely no basis whatsoever for assuming that Crete, or the Peloponnessus, or Macedonia, or Thrace, or all of Greece, could be successfully incorporated into the American Union as a State—even if Greece and the Greeks desired the same.

The argument that America has successfully absorbed people of several very diverse foreign stocks has no bearing, then, on the question of whether American statehood could be successfully extended to offshore areas and overseas lands inhabited by widely differing peoples. To bring the peoples to America and settle them among ourselves and make of them Americans is one thing—and even then it is not always easy and often takes a long time, perhaps a generation or longer depending on the degree of dissimilarity to the basic American stock; to attempt to bring America to the peoples by means of the official act of statehood is quite another thing. Statehood may make them Americans in name, Americans by citizenship, Americans in a purely technical sense; it cannot make them Americans in fact. And, to the extent of the voting
representation in this Senate and the House to which they would be entitled under statehood, we would be delivering America into their hands—into the hands of non-Americans! We have too much of this today.

But, Mr. President, perhaps you are asking yourself why I am going into all of this discussion about foreign stocks and overseas peoples when the subject before us is Alaska and when I, myself, have already declared earlier in this address that the majority of the population of Alaska is composed of American stock, a great proportion having actually been born in the States.

I will tell you why, Mr. President. The reason is that I am opposed to Alaskan statehood not so much as something in and of itself but rather as a precedent—an ominous and dangerous precedent.

Should we oppose something otherwise good and beneficial merely because of considerations of precedent? Some may well ask this question. Let me reply: First of all, I do not consider Alaskan statehood otherwise good or beneficial, but on the contrary harmful and unwise, for many reasons, as I have already pointed out; but even if I did consider it a good and beneficial step, unless the good to be derived were of such a tremendous magnitude as completely to outweigh all other considerations, yes, I most definitely would oppose this measure because of the overriding consideration of precedent. Especially when I know full well that the precedent which would be established could well lead to the destruction of the United States of America and the collapse of the free world.

Some say that our rule against admission to the Union of non-contiguous areas was long ago broken anyway, and that we are a little late in being so concerned about precedent. They refer to
the case of California, admitted to the Union in 1850. It is true that at the time of its admission California was not contiguous to other already-admitted States. The same may have been true in one or two other instances in our history. But always the territory in between, if not already possessed of State status, was commonly owned American territory, an integral part of our solid block of land.

Thus, we can see that our rule against admitting non-contiguous areas has been kept intact throughout our history as a country. The question before us today is whether or not to break that rule, thus establishing a precedent for the admission of offshore territories to statehood in the American Union.

Let no one be deceived into thinking that we can safely break the line by admitting Alaska and then re-establish another line which will hold. I hope that no Senators feel that it is safe to admit Alaska, in the mistaken belief that even after doing so we can still draw forth a sacred and holy rule which is not to be broken: a Rule Against Admitting any Territory Not a Part of the North American Continent. Such a rule will not hold for even a single session of Congress, because you know and I know that, once Alaska becomes a State, the doors will be wide open for Hawaiian statehood. And with the admission of Hawaii, out goes any rule about North-American-continent-only. Then will come the deluge: Guam and Samoa, Puerto Rico, Okinawa, the Marshalls. The next logical step in the process would be what I have already alluded to: the incorporation in the American Union of politically-threatened or economically-demoralized nations in Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, and Africa. This is a progressively cumulative process,
each step being relatively easier than the preceding one, as the
legislative vote of the overseas bloc grows steadily larger with
each new admission. Indeed it is conceivable, when we consider the
"ultimate possibilities" which may result from passage of this bill,
that we who call ourselves Americans today may some day find
ourselves a minority in our own Union, outvoted in our own
legislature—just as the native people of Jordan have made
themselves a minority in their own country by incorporating into
Jordan a large section of the original Palestine and thus acquiring
a Palestinian Arab population outnumbering their own.

I repeat: this is not a case of conjuring up a ridiculous
extreme. This is a distinct possibility which must be considered
by this body before we take the irrevocable step—irrevocable, Mr.
President, irrevocable!—of admitting Alaska to statehood in the
American Union.

Mr. President, in addition to the two major objections which I
have just outlined, there are a number of other reasons why I oppose
statehood for Alaska.

For one thing, I have grave doubts that Alaska is economically
capable of assuming the responsibilities that go with statehood. I
have already briefly touched on this, but now I should like to go
into this aspect in a little more detail. The Honorable Craig
Hosmer of California clearly outlined to the House when this bill
was under consideration there some of the economic aspects of this
problem.

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Mr. President, another reason why I object to statehood for
Alaska is this: The Alaskan Statehood Bill raises grave legal
questions which have not been answered. For example, the section authorizing the President to withdraw northern Alaska from State control and to transfer the governmental functions to the Federal government would weaken the sovereignty of Alaska and make it inferior to the other States. This could set a precedent for further invasion of the sovereignty of the other States of the Union.

The so-called national defense withdrawal proposal deserves considerable more attention than it is getting. Much propaganda has been disseminated in an effort to show that even the original native population of Alaska has adopted the American way of life and thus qualifies for statehood. The proposed withdrawal indicates, on the contrary, that the United States government is adopting the philosophy of the native Indians as exemplified by the most gigantic "Indian gift" conceivable.

First, Alaskan statehood proponents and this bill would allow the entirety of the territory of Alaska to be incorporated within the bounds of the proposed State. The State would have, initially, complete jurisdiction of the entire area now included within the territorial limits of Alaska. The United States, however, once conceived as a government of limited power, derived by grant from the States, themselves, proposes to reserve the right to withdraw from the State and administer as a territorial possession almost one-half—270,000 square miles of the total 586,000 square miles—of the State and to return it to semi-territorial status and administration.
There occurs to me two reasons why this strange and unprecedented procedure may have been proposed. I am inclined to believe that both reasons were influential, but that the second is paramount. Let me say at this point that I thoroughly agree that the area embodied in this "Indian gift" should be retained by the United States for defense purposes. The United States would make a terrible mistake to impair its jurisdiction of this area to any extent whatsoever.

The first logical explanation for the "Indian gift" embodied in this bill is that a great proportion of the propaganda promulgated for the purpose of obtaining statehood was based on the dubious economical assets within the so-called withdrawal area. Included in the withdrawal area is all of Northern Alaska; the Seward peninsula—including the City of Nome with all of its overly touted gold mines; one-half of the Alaskan peninsula; the entirety of the Aleutian Islands; St. Lawrence Island; and those other islands of the Berin Sea which provide the home for seal and walrus. Without the inclusion of this area within the State, Alaska's bid for statehood would be even weaker, if a weaker case could be conceived.

The second motive to which I attribute this "Indian gift" is more subtle, and in my opinion, paramount. Our government is one which relies for its operation, to a great extent, on precedent. Even on the floor of this Senate, the proponents of legislation invariably take the trouble to point out to their colleagues that there has been a precedent for such legislation, even though the precedent might be very illusory.
Now let us look at the precedent which our ambitious Federal government is seeking to establish. The United States, by this proposed treaty with Alaska, seeks to confirm its right, as exercised by the President in his discretion, to withdraw from the jurisdiction of the States, unlimited areas, which our all-powerful Federal bureaucracy can administer according to its whim in the status of a territory. If such a right is established in one instance, would we be so naive as to believe that the Federal government would not cite this as a precedent for its authority to withdraw all of the coastal areas of the United States from the jurisdiction of the individual States in the interest of national defense? Do not be deceived! I do not hesitate, like Mark Antony, to attribute ambition to the ambitious. This Federal bureaucracy is ambitious, and worse, it is power hungry. It is a constant usurper of authority. It is a would-be tyrant. It is only through the maintenance of the integrity of the individual States that we can preserve the inherent right to local self-government that is our precious heritage. The proposed withdrawal agreement is a step toward the destruction of State entities and, thereby, a step toward the destruction of the right of local self-government.

The use of such a precedent is in defiance of the Constitution and contrary to the basic concepts on which this country was founded. This withdrawal proposal, although only one of many legally questionable aspects of this bill, is a more than sufficient cause, in itself, for the Senate of the United States to reject statehood for Alaska in the form proposed.
Mr. President, the provision of the bill granting public land to the State of Alaska is the greatest "give-away" ever incorporated into a statehood bill. This gift is not in the interest of the people who inhabit the Territory of Alaska, nor is it in the interest of the United States.

It is not difficult to understand how this "great give-away" came to be written into the Alaskan Statehood Bill. The drafters of the bill found themselves impaled on the horns of an insoluble dilemma.

The dilemma was this:

The land area of the Territory of Alaska is owned 99 per cent by the Federal government. To declare such an area to be a State is a palpable absurdity. Obviously, a State which is almost wholly owned by the Federal government cannot exercise any significant degree of sovereignty. It has no opportunity for any real independence of action. Such a State is merely a puppet State.

At the same time, the other horn of the dilemma evidently appeared to be equally sharp. Certainly it could not be ignored, for the point of the second horn was personified by the persistent, well organized and clamorous Alaskan Statehood lobby, which was doing its best to effectively convey the impression that Statehood would remedy a whole conglomeration of Alaskan ailments.

I sympathize with the gentlemen who had to wrestle with this problem. They wished to satisfy those Alaskans who were demanding Statehood, but they could not, in clear conscience, see any basis for Statehood in an area owned 99 per cent by the Federal government.
I sympathize with the gentlemen. But I reject their solution as unworkable and unwise.

I quote now from the House Report:

To alter the present distorted landownership pattern in Alaska under which the Federal Government owns 99 per cent of the total area, the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs proposes land grants to the new State aggregating 182,800,000 acres. Four hundred thousand acres are to be selected by State authorities within 50 years after Alaska is admitted to the Union from lands within national forests in Alaska which are vacant and unappropriated at the time of their selection. Another 400,000 acres of vacant, unappropriated, and unreserved land adjacent to established communities or suitable for prospective community or recreational areas are to be selected by State authorities within 50 years after the new State is admitted. The 182 million acres of vacant, unappropriated, and unreserved public lands are to be selected within 25 years after the enactment of this legislation from the area not included in land subject to military withdrawals as described in section 11 of H.R. 7999 without the express approval of the President or his designated representative. In each instance valid existing claims, entries, and locations in the acreages to be selected will be fully protected.

As stated earlier, a grant of this size to a new State, whether considered in terms of total acreage or of percentage of area of the State, is unprecedented.

Mr. President, I call the attention of the Senate to the word "unprecedented" in the Report of the Committee which recommended that the House of Representatives pass this bill. The word is well chosen.

The Members of this body are accustomed to dealing with large numbers, in considering the legislation that comes before the Senate. No doubt the Members of this body can readily visualize how large an area is encompassed in 182,800 acres. Perhaps there are some interested citizens, however, who would like to have this astronomical number of acres expressed in...
simpler terms.

It is 285,625 square miles. It is an area somewhat larger than the State of Texas. It is larger than the States of California and Nevada combined. It is more than nine times as large as the State of South Carolina.

As delivered to the Senate, the bill scales down this grant to 102,550,000 acres. It is still a figure large enough to take anyone's breath away. It is almost half as much as the total acreage granted to all 48 States. It is by far the largest amount ever bequeathed by the Government to any State. It is almost twice as much as the total granted to the last 10 States admitted to the Union.

The bill specifically provides that the State may select lands which are now under lease for oil and gas or coal development, or which may even be under production for those products. The bill specifically provides that the grants of public lands to the State of Alaska shall include mineral rights, and that these mineral rights shall be controlled by the State.

Congress ought not to give away this vast area of land which belongs, not to the people of Alaska alone, but to all citizens of the United States. The bill provides that the State of Alaska shall have a free hand in selecting the land it will be given.

What is the monetary value of this land? Nobody knows. Most of it has never been surveyed.

Mr. President, I submit that the United States should make it a strict rule never to give away anything to anybody without at least taking a close look at the gift to see what it is. Nobody has ever taken a thorough look at the land and mineral resources of Alaska.
Mr. President, I hope that I have been able to show why I consider the passage of the measure before us, the granting of statehood to Alaska, to be unwise -- to be, in my opinion, the very height of folly. I should now like to take a few moments to show that this action is also unnecessary -- unnecessary even to Alaska, unnecessary for the bringing about of that condition of self-rule which, it is said, is Alaska's main reason for seeking statehood.

The choice is not statehood or nothing. There is another alternative, a plan which would be far safer for the United States and also far better for the people of Alaska. The same applies also in the case of Hawaii. This alternative is commonwealth status, along the lines proposed several years ago by, among others, the distinguished junior Senator from Oklahoma. I shall outline briefly the advantages of this commonwealth plan, by referring to Senator Monroney's own presentation thereof.

Commonwealth status would give to the people of Alaska -- and Hawaii -- complete local self-government. It would give them complete freedom to select their own legislators, their own judges, and their own executive, and to conduct freely their own local affairs.

The citizens of Alaska would enjoy, within their own commonwealth, practically all the privileges enjoyed by the citizens of our 48 States. In addition, a commonwealth would have one tremendous advantage over a State. It would have the power to raise and retain all tax revenue originating in its area. Commonwealth citizens would not be subject to our Federal income tax, at least as regards income derived from within the commonwealth. I shall discuss this aspect in more detail in a few minutes.
Now, as the distinguished Senator so ably pointed out, Mr. President, citizens of a commonwealth are in no sense beneath those of the mother country. "I am sure no Canadian feels inferior to a Briton," Senator Monroney declared, "and there is no reason why he should. I have heard of no movement in Canada to make that member of the British Commonwealth of Nations a more direct participant in the government of the British Isles. The same statements apply to other members of the British Commonwealth."

Mr. President, I know of no people who have had more experience with overseas associates than the British. After a century or more of trial and error, they have developed the commonwealth plan as the most workable relationship in the modern world between a home government and distant associated governments.

The commonwealth plan fully recognizes the rights of the people to be free and to have home governments of their own choice, and, at the same time, recognizes their mutual responsibility for security against an outside enemy.

Now I realize, Mr. President, that the commonwealth status extended by the United States to distant territories need not -- in fact, could not -- be identical in all respects with the British system. Unlike members of the British Commonwealth, our commonwealths would not have separate foreign relations. They would not have their own ambassadors to foreign countries. In common with the existing States of our Union, the American commonwealths would have no foreign relations except through the government in Washington. Nor would there be any separate currencies under the American plan. As far as Congressional representation is concerned, our commonwealth members would be represented by delegates, as now.
Under commonwealth status, Alaska would enjoy complete self-government over its entire area, except of course in areas controlled by the Federal government for defense and other national purposes — as with every State in the Union.

No State would have greater power over its own affairs. In fact, as I have already pointed out, due to the progress of Federal usurpation of the constitutional powers and rights of the States, a movement which shows no sign of diminishing its pace, no State is likely to have nearly as much power over its own affairs as a commonwealth.

Like the States, the commonwealths would be free to write and adopt their own constitutions — subject, as are the States, to requirements of the Federal Constitution. They would have the right to create their own governmental systems, their offices, their courts, their own regulatory boards and commissions. They would control their own elections, and depending on their own preferences could fill offices by either election or appointment.

The commonwealth approach would do away with the objectionable features which, it is claimed, mark Alaska's dependency as a territory. The same would be true, of course, in the case of Hawaii. Their Governors, often non-residents under the present set-up, would no longer be appointed by Washington; instead they would be elected by the people of each area. Local judges also would be locally selected. Instead of having their daily life closely regulated and supervised by the Department of the Interior and its territorial bureaucracy, the people would control their own lands to the same extent as the people of any State.

The inhabitants of a commonwealth would enjoy full autonomy in all matters of self-government; yet they would also have the full
protection of our Constitution, including the Bill of Rights. They would share in the benefits and detriments of Federal legislation, as the States do.

But for the lack of full representation in the national Congress, it would be difficult to find material differences between commonwealth and State status, except that a greater degree of self-government would probably reside in the commonwealths eventually, owing to unfortunate trends toward Federal encroachment on the States. And for their lack of full national representation in Congress, one very important compensation has been proposed for the commonwealths -- exemption from Federal income tax.

As set forth by the distinguished junior Senator from Oklahoma, Mr. President, here is the way this tax-exemption feature would operate:

All revenues originating within the commonwealth areas would be at the disposal of locally chosen officials for expenditure within those areas. Because the commonwealth plan does not provide for voting membership in the national Congress, it seems to me (I am quoting from Senator Monroney's remarks) that this exemption is necessary to maintain the fine American tradition of no taxation without full representation. But this provision would not mean that citizens of continental United States could avoid their Federal income taxes merely by establishing residence in a commonwealth area. Only that income derived from production, employment or investment in the areas would be exempt. Income earned in the United States, even though received by a resident of Hawaii or Alaska, would still be taxed at our regular rates.

Mr. President, this tax exemption would be of incalculable importance for the development of these areas. It would strike at the very root of Alaska's economic problem, which is due to no inconsiderable extent to tax factors. This opportunity to invest and to develop new industries and new enterprises while paying only local taxes will help to attract badly-needed private capital to the area.
Our government has experienced great difficulties in attempting to attract immigration to our territories, especially Alaska. The projects have been characterized by costly administration and cumbersome regulations and red tape. The rigid rules which must surround the expenditure of government funds or of government-guaranteed loans do not facilitate development in pioneer countries. Free enterprise, with its risk and high return after taxes, would do a far better job. Alaska, with all its timber, minerals, land and fisheries, is starved for investment capital because the returns after taxes are insufficient to reward the venture.

Naturally, over and against the rich benefits which they would enjoy, any new commonwealth areas would have a full obligation, as has Puerto Rico, for the defense of the United States. As in any State, their land and their harbors would be subject to condemnation for military purposes, and their young men would be subject to the draft.

Mr. President, there is no need for this body to take the view that it is statehood or nothing. The alternative plan of commonwealth status would be far better for Alaska. More important, it would be far better, and far safer, from the standpoint of the United States, as a whole, to give Alaska commonwealth status than to take the reckless, unwise and unnecessary step of admitting Alaska to statehood in the Union.
Mr. President, in conclusion I should like briefly to summarize six of the principal reasons why I am so firmly opposed to the admission of Alaska to statehood. These reasons are:

First: Alaska is a territory with a poorly-developed and very unsound economy, a territory in which the principal activities are those conducted by the Federal government. I have grave doubt that Alaska is economically capable of assuming the responsibilities that go with statehood.

Second: The Alaskan Statehood Bill raises grave legal questions which have not been answered. For example, the section authorizing the President to withdraw northern and western Alaska from State control and to transfer the governmental functions to the Federal government would weaken the sovereignty of Alaska and make it inferior to the other States. I cannot see how this could be construed as being constitutional. If it were so construed, it could set a precedent for the invasion of the sovereignty of other States by the Federal government.

Third: The provision of the bill granting public land to the State of Alaska is the greatest give-away ever incorporated in a statehood bill. The gift is not in the interest of the people who live in the territory of Alaska, nor in the interest of the people of the United States.

Fourth: The new State of Alaska would require extraordinary Federal aid. Those persons who favor the extension of Federal power at the expense of the States would seize upon this as an excuse to extend further Federal aid to all the States, and State sovereignty would be further diminished.
Fifth: The admission of Alaska, a non-contiguous area, would set a precedent for the admission of other non-contiguous areas, whose customs, traditions and basic philosophies have non-American roots.

Sixth: There is no necessity to grant statehood to Alaska, for it is possible -- through the commonwealth plan -- to provide Alaska with a form of government which will give its citizens as great a degree of home rule as they desire.

Mr. President, I hope we will all bear in mind the fact that statehood, once granted, is irrevocable. I urge my fellow Senators to join with me in opposing this dangerous bill.

Mr. President, as much as I abhor the idea, I realize that there is a possibility that this bill may pass. I, therefore, send to the desk an amendment which is one of many which should be incorporated in the bill before passage is even given serious consideration. I ask unanimous consent that this amendment be printed. It is my intention to speak at length about this amendment at a later point in the debate.