

## A Brief History of Capital-Move Measures

The capital move has been a fixture of Alaska politics since statehood. When Alaska's first constitutional convention met in November 1955, the issue of whether the capital should remain in Juneau was one of many hot issues before the delegates. The convention itself was conceived as a tactical move in the battle for statehood, and the capital move question was a divisive issue most delegates wanted to avoid. Juneau had been the territorial capital since 1912 and those who wanted the capital to remain in Juneau hoped the final draft of the constitution would make it a permanent state capital. Those wishing to relocate the capital to Western Alaska wanted nothing in the document that would give Juneau any constitutional status as the state capital.

The constitutional convention finished its work in February 1956. Article XV - "Schedule of Transitional Measures," Section 20 of Alaska's constitution states simply, "The capital of the state of Alaska shall be at Juneau." On January 3, 1959, Alaska officially became a state. Almost immediately an initiative petition was circulated to move the capital from Juneau. On August 9, 1960, Initiative Proposal No. 1 to relocate the capital within the Cook Inlet-Railbelt Area" came to a vote and was turned down by the voters (18,856 yes; 23,972 no).

Undaunted, the capital movers, cheered on by the *Anchorage Times* and its owner-publisher Robert Atwood, secured enough signatures to place another initiative on the August 1962 Primary Election ballot. The initiative called for the relocation of the capital "...in Western Alaska, to a site not within 30 miles of Anchorage." A committee of state senators was to pick three sites to be chosen by a plurality vote of the people.

This time, the opposition mounted a legal challenge arguing that, because Juneau was named as capital in Article XV, Section 20 of the state constitution, this provision could not be amended by initiative but would require an amendment to the constitution.

In *Starr v. Hagglund*, 374 P.2d 316 (Alaska 1962), the Alaska Supreme Court decided that the initiative could go on the November 1962 General Election ballot on the grounds that the section of the constitution providing that Juneau was the capital was not intended to be a permanent part of the fundamental law of the state. That November, voters rejected the second proposal to move the capital (32,325 no; 26,542 yes).

For the capital movers, still led by Atwood and the *Anchorage Times*, the third time was the charm. In August 1974, Initiative Proposal No. 1 to relocate the capital to a Western Alaska site at least 30 miles from Anchorage was approved by a vote of 46,659 to 35,325.

The 1974 initiative provided for a capital site selection committee to pick three sites to be submitted to voters with the site receiving a plurality of votes to be the site of the new capital. In 1976, voters chose Willow. Then, in 1978, they approved an initiative requiring that all bondable costs of capital relocation be approved by voters prior to the expenditure of state money to relocate the capital. At the same time, however, voters rejected \$966 million in general obligation bonds to build a new capital at Willow.

The showdown came in 1982, when Alaskans turned down, by a vote of 102,083 to 91,049, a \$2.8 billion bond issue to cover all bondable costs associated with moving the capital from Juneau to Willow. The 1982 vote was relatively close, considering the dollar magnitude of the proposition facing voters and the state was flush with oil revenues. Many capital movers believed that, despite the wilderness setting of the Willow site, the cost had been overstated.

In August 1993, a group headed by State Representative Pat Carney of Wasilla, filed a petition for an initiative to move the capital to Wasilla. Over the previous four years, Carney had tried unsuccessfully to move bills through the Legislature to relocate the Legislature to his district.

After receiving a \$40,000 appropriation from the Wasilla City Council, the Carney group ("Move It") hired the firm of Hellenthal & Associates of Anchorage to gather roughly 26,000 signatures to place the question on the 1994 General Election ballot. Carney's efforts reactivated the FRANK (Fiscally Responsible Alaskans Needing Knowledge) Committee headed by C.B. Bettisworth of Fairbanks.

Before the deadline in January 1994, both the Carney Initiative and the FRANK Initiative had turned in more than the required signatures for ballot certification. Like the 1978 FRANK Initiative, which was repealed automatically when the 1982 capital move ballot measure failed, the new FRANK Initiative provided that no money can be spent to move the capital until a commission appointed by the Governor presents a bondable cost figure to voters and voters approve the costs of the move. Unlike the 1978 FRANK Initiative, the 1994 version also included the costs of a legislative move.

In November 1994, voters approved the FRANK Initiative by 77% of the vote (159,781 yes, 46,665 no) and rejected the initiative to move the capital to Wasilla (116,277 no, 96,398 yes).

On July 23, 2001, the Lieutenant Governor certified an initiative (Ballot Measure No. 2 on the November 5, 2002 election ballot) that would require the Alaska Legislature to hold its sessions in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (or in Anchorage until facilities are available in the Mat-Su). The initiative would also repeal all provisions of the 1994 FRANK law dealing with moving the Legislature. The group sponsoring this initiative and registered with the Alaska Public Offices Commission to wage a campaign in support of Ballot Measure No. 2 is "Alaskans for Efficient Government." The primary spokespersons in this group were Robert Monson, Mark Chryson, and Uwe Kalenka.

On November 5, 2002, the initiative to move legislative sessions north was defeated 153,127 to 74,650 – a margin that exceeded 2 to 1.

The Alaska Committee anticipates that the cost issue and the right to know and vote on the costs shall be major determining factors on this question in the future, especially in light of declining oil production and revenue.