

Daily News Opinion

Owner-state model would benefit Sudan

For 16 years, my son Jack worked in southern Africa as a medical missionary, mostly in Swaziland. When his mother and I visited, we discovered that, in spite of the dramatically different climate, Jack was facing challenges in rural Africa that were similar to those in rural Alaska.

Since 1997 Jack has been back in Alaska earning funds to help his children get through college. He works at the Alaska Native Medical Center, but he has never lost his commitment to Africa.

More than a year ago, he visited southern Sudan to help Dr. Jill Seaman, a Bethel physician who works for much of the year in the remote village of Old Fangak, located in the largest swamp in the world, east of the Nile River.

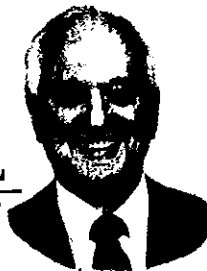
He found Dr. Seaman single-handedly saving the lives of hundreds of people from surrounding villages while working in primitive conditions with limited supplies. He returned home determined to build a hospital for the region.

Since then, Jack and others have launched the Alaska Sudan Medical Project. They have designed a health center and, entirely from private funds, have raised nearly half of the \$900,000 it will take to build it. In the process, they have enlisted a volunteer team of more than 30 Alaska builders, doctors and adventurers.

This past semester, Jack's son Justin, 21, left his engineering studies at Colorado State to help out. In Nairobi, Kenya, he purchased building supplies and trucked them to Juba, the capital of southern Sudan. As he arranged for barges to ship the supplies to the village, he navigated through the turmoil resulting from renewed killings in nearby Darfur and the indictment of Sudan's president, Omar al-

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COMMENT



Bashir, for war crimes by the International Criminal Court.

Finally, last month, Justin loaded and shipped the supplies, and Jack and others joined him in Old Fangak.

During fundraising efforts last September, individuals close to the southern Sudan government showed up in Anchorage. The southern part of Sudan, made up mostly of black Africans, fought a civil war against the north for more than 20 years. In a 2005 peace agreement, they won the right to hold a vote in December 2011 to determine whether or not to secede.

In a conversation with these guests, Jack and I discussed the similarities between southern Sudan today and Alaska prior to statehood in 1959. It's a familiar story — rich country, poor people. We explained the system in Alaska that we call the owner-state that has helped eliminate poverty here.

Since that meeting, the idea of applying the owner-state model in Africa has gained momentum. Jack's older son, Jason, 26, who was born in Africa and speaks fluent Zulu, has been meeting with economists and activists in South Africa. They are intrigued by the provisions in Alaska's Constitution that require our commonly owned 103 million acres of state

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land and resources be used for the maximum benefit of our people.

To avoid the mistakes of many missionaries and free-market promoters, we have no intention of pushing our ideas down the throats of others. For the Alaska model to succeed, here or anywhere, people must understand it, believe in it, and dedicate themselves to make it successful. So we look forward to African leaders coming to Alaska to see the owner state for themselves.

Several Alaska Native leaders are prepared to help. For them, the community, rather than the individual, comes first. That's why their ancestors survived in our challenging climate for thousands of years, and it is the key to the owner state.

That is also the tradition in Africa, Russia and China, where leaders and thinkers are looking for new directions for the future. They may be surprised to discover that there is a successful model that combines commonly owned lands and resources with a constitutional democracy.

They won't find it in London, New York or Paris. But it is alive and well in Alaska.

Walter J. Hickel served as governor of Alaska from 1966-1968 and from 1990-1994 and as U.S. Secretary of the Interior from 1969-1970. For more information on the Alaska Sudan Medical Project see www.alaskasudan.org.