

# Anchorage Daily News



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# OPINION

## Ex-colony can be Russian role model

There are strong indications here that Russia has turned a corner economically and politically. Moscow, with its population of 10 million, glitters with affluence, copes with enormous traffic jams and exudes confidence.

High oil prices have helped. Second only to Saudi Arabia, Russia exports 5.8 million barrels of oil per day and, since January of last year, has set aside \$22 billion from its oil revenues in a Stabilization Fund that is expected to reach \$82 billion by the end of 2008.

President Vladimir Putin took forceful action last year to crack down on corruption and regain control of the 89 Russian regions, some of which were threatening to secede. His actions were widely criticized in the U.S. and Europe as anti-democratic, but they are proving to be so successful there is talk that a gradual return of democratic institutions in the regions may soon begin.

Paul Wolfowitz, the U.S. conservative who now heads the World Bank, remarked here this week that Russia is doing much better than "I feared would be the case."

I came to Moscow this time at the invitation of academician Alexander Granberg to participate in the celebration of the 90th anniversary of Russia's oldest economic think tank, the Center for the Study of Productive Forces. The day before, Granberg hosted a symposium of economists and scholars to discuss my book "Crisis in the Commons: the Alaska Solution."

"Let's think out both the positive and negative lessons of the Alaska model," Granberg wrote in the introduction to the Russian edition, "and accept what is vital and relevant for our country."

My relationship with Russia began in 1969 when I had a series of conversations

**WALLY HICKEL**

COMMENT



with Russian Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin about what Russia and Alaska have in common. He later arranged a monthlong trip in 1981 by train through the taiga forest from Khabarovsk to Lake Baikal with airborne visits to Yakutsk and Bratsk and then on to Moscow.

Russia and Alaska share a common history, and we understand that in the Arctic both the economy and the environment require a unique kind of stewardship. I suggested to those attending the symposium this week that we work together to show other community-based and commonly owned areas of the world how to utilize the land and ocean commons to eradicate poverty.

The attendees were especially interested in the "owner state" Alaskans have created, using the oil discovered on state lands to benefit our people. At issue for Russia, as it is for us, is how to insure that publicly-owned lands and resources benefit the local people and are not monopolized by a few insiders, the federal "center" or Outside companies with global agendas.

It was a remarkable session. Andrei Il-larionov, the top economic advisor to President Putin, was among the 40 economists and academics who attended. He was full of questions and comments. He told us he had obtained a copy of the book the day before and had read it until 4 a.m. The Alaska model is "very timely for Russia at the mo-

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ment," he told the group.

Dr. Evgeny Velikov, the director of the Kurchatov Institute of Science, explained President Putin's recent decision to create the Public Chamber, a body made up of 43 respected Russians from throughout the country. They will represent diverse constituencies including the religious community. Their assignment is to conduct a two-year dialogue with the administration on behalf of the general public. Dr. Velikov will chair the group and invited me to attend the first session in January.

Russia's problems are far from over. Rural living, especially in the North and the Far East has become bleak for many, and populations are migrating away from remote frontier areas. Pensioners and others on fixed incomes are living hand to mouth, and violent breakaway movements continue in Chechnya and the Caucasus.

Returning to Russia after a year, however, I can see progress being made. Most encouraging, Putin and the Kremlin leadership are seeking new ideas, and they are turning to Alaska, their former colony, as they seek solutions.

■ Walter J. Hickel served as governor of Alaska from 1966 to 1968 and 1990 to 1994 and as U.S. secretary of the interior from 1969 to 1970. He is the founder of the Institute of the North.