

# Daily News Opinion

## Dobrynin a source of warmth during Cold War

Although I am slowing down at age 90, some of the deep beliefs that motivated my years in public life still inspire me. Two landmark events took place this month with regard to one of those beliefs — that Russia and America will one day work together to build a better world.

On April 6 President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed a treaty to reduce the arsenals of nuclear weapons in both countries. Two days later, Anatoly Dobrynin, the former Ambassador from Russia to the U.S. and a longtime friend, passed away.

When President Nixon appointed me to his cabinet in 1969, I met Ambassador Dobrynin and with our common Northern background we struck up a friendship.

I told the ambassador of my interest in visiting Russia but not “for a cocktail party in Moscow.” I wanted to see his country from the Alaska side and was eager to take the Trans Siberian Railroad from Vladivostok west to look at the vast expanse of Russia that encompasses half of the world Arctic.

Shortly thereafter, President Nixon announced in a cabinet meeting that I had been invited to Russia. Unfortunately, his national security advisor Henry Kissinger, who looked at the world from the perspective of war-torn Europe, intervened and stopped me.

My interest in Russia began when I met the pilots flying Lend Lease aircraft from the South 48 through Alaska to fight Hitler’s army on the Eastern Front during World War II. I was an aircraft inspector at Elmendorf Field, and I discovered the Russians to be friendly and quick of wit.

A decade after leaving the cabinet, I contacted Dobrynin again, and he renewed his invitation. My wife Ermalee, our son Karl and I, along with Mead Treadwell, took that fascinat-

**WALLY  
HICKEL**

COMMENT



ing trip in 1981.

We visited the great Neryungri coal mine in what is now the Sakha Republic and were shown diamonds in Mirny, currently ranked as the world’s second-largest source of diamonds following Africa.

All along the route, we were greeted by friendly faces. At some of the most remote locations, we bought the delicious home-cooked lunches that housewives sold from the platforms to travelers from afar.

Dobrynin was ambassador to the U.S. for a remarkable 24 years and played a pivotal role in steering his country and ours through the dangerous days of the Cuban Missile Crisis. As much as any man in my generation he understood the dangers of nuclear war and worked skillfully behind the scenes to remove them.

When he left DC, he became the secretary for foreign affairs for the Communist Party Central Committee and worked closely with President Mikhail Gorbachev. My guess is that he played a key role in helping to design Russia’s policies of Glasnost (openness) and Perestroika (restructuring) that led to the dramatic shift away from Communism.

In 1988, I joined the symbolic “Friendship Flight” from Nome to Provideniya and the following year was elected governor for the sec-

*Dobrynin was ambassador to the US for a remarkable 24 years and played a pivotal role in steering his country and ours through the dangerous days of the Cuban Missile Crisis.*

ond time and helped found the Northern Forum. The goal was to usher in a new era of Arctic cooperation that included Russia’s northern regional governments.

Through the Northern Forum and later the Institute of the North, we have worked on opening the Northern Sea Route along the Arctic coast of Russia as a direct and economical shipping route between the Pacific and the Atlantic.

Another dream has been a tunnel beneath the Bering Strait to link Russian and U.S. land masses, creating the final link in a “railroad around the world” improving commerce and communications between our great countries.

The last time I was in Moscow I called Ambassador Dobrynin. He was in the hospital, but his booming voice recalled our efforts to bring our countries together. I’ll miss him. I hope that before he died he was aware of the latest breakthrough on U.S.-Russia nuclear weapons reduction. If so, I’m sure he died a happy man.

Walter J. Hickel with Malcolm Roberts. Hickel was governor of Alaska from 1966-1968 and 1990-1994 and U.S. Secretary of the Interior from 1969-1970. He is the founder of the Institute of the North where Roberts is a senior fellow.