

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 2

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

TWENTY-SIXTH LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION

BY SENATOR DAVIS

Introduced: 1/21/09

Referred: Education

A RESOLUTION

1 **Urging the United States Congress to establish a federal program to rebuild student**
2 **access to public higher education in Alaska and elsewhere and to appropriate sufficient**
3 **funding for that purpose.**

4 **BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:**

5 **WHEREAS** the global financial crisis has brought a renewed focus on the task of
6 strengthening our public universities as the key to our country's long-term economic viability
7 and continued prosperity; and

8 **WHEREAS**, although the President of the United States and the United States
9 Congress have appropriated massive amounts of American taxpayers' dollars to stem the
10 financial bleeding on Wall Street, it is not clear what commitment will be made to rebuild our
11 human infrastructure; and

12 **WHEREAS** individuals from all walks of life and political persuasions agree that
13 broad access to high quality public higher education is key to a positive economic outcome
14 for the American people, and that the very survival of a strong United States economy
15 requires a highly educated workforce; and

1 **WHEREAS** affordable, accessible, quality higher education is not only good for an
2 individual's financial success but, more importantly, is also essential for our society's
3 prosperity; and

4 **WHEREAS** stakeholders in Alaska's education community have for years advocated
5 for proper funding for high quality public higher education that is accessible and affordable to
6 every Alaskan; and

7 **WHEREAS**, because of increasingly dire economic conditions and modest levels of
8 federal support, an erosion of public resources dedicated to Alaska's universities can be
9 anticipated; and

10 **WHEREAS** declining state and federal support for public higher education has
11 translated into fewer classes and larger class sizes, compounding costs and impeding students'
12 timely progress toward completion of their degrees; and

13 **WHEREAS** higher education has become increasingly unaffordable to middle-class
14 and working-class Americans, raising barriers to attending college in Alaska and across the
15 United States and threatening the standing of the United States in the international
16 competition for a trained workforce; and

17 **WHEREAS**, between 1982 and 2007, college tuition and fees rose three times as fast
18 as median family income after adjusting for inflation; and

19 **WHEREAS**, in the past decade, the number of undergraduate borrowers has increased
20 50 percent, and the inflation-adjusted total of student debt has doubled; and

21 **WHEREAS** Alaska has the lowest graduation rate among the 50 states for first-year,
22 first-time college students; and

23 **WHEREAS** Alaska ranks at the bottom of the 50 states for the percentage of degrees
24 awarded for each 100 undergraduate students; and

25 **WHEREAS** fewer than one in five Alaskans 18 - 24 years of age, barely more than
26 one-half the national average, are enrolled in college; and

27 **WHEREAS** Alaska is one of only two states in which college entrance scores have
28 dropped; and

29 **WHEREAS**, since 2000, tuition fees for the University of Alaska have increased
30 substantially; and

31 **WHEREAS** students and families in the state rely on the University of Alaska to

1 educate our future entrepreneurs, business owners, peace officers, educators, and public
2 officials, each of whom play an important role in the state's economy; and

3 **WHEREAS**, the federal government has allocated \$700,000,000,000, more than 10
4 times the size of the fiscal year 2007 budget of the United States Department of Education, to
5 bail out Wall Street; and

6 **WHEREAS** \$700,000,000,000 could be used instead to send 5,400,000 students to
7 public universities in the United States;

8 **BE IT RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature urges the President of the
9 United States and the United States Congress to enact a "New Deal for a New Millennium for
10 Higher Education" that will enable Alaska and other states to rebuild the states' public higher
11 education systems; and be it

12 **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature urges the United States
13 Congress to establish a federal program to rebuild student access to public higher education
14 that includes

15 (1) funding in the amount of \$70,000,000,000, 10 percent of the amount
16 allocated to bailout Wall Street;

17 (2) college grants similar to the World War II era G.I. Bill of Rights;

18 (3) an increase in funding for Pell grants for lower income students; and

19 (4) student loan debt forgiveness.

20 **COPIES** of this resolution shall be sent to the Honorable Barack Obama, President of
21 the United States; and the Honorable Lisa Murkowski and the Honorable Mark Begich, U.S.
22 Senators, and the Honorable Don Young, U.S. Representative, members of the Alaska
23 delegation in Congress.