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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

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April 16, 2018

The Honorable Chuck Kopp
Alaska State House of Representatives
State Capitol Room 13
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Dear Representative Kopp,


As the Alaska Representative to the U.S. Congress during the debate and passage of the Alaska Railroad Transfer Act of 1982 (ARTA), I am writing today to thank you for shining a spotlight on some troubling issues regarding the Act's implementation, as well as to provide some background regarding my understanding of what ARTA authorized.

House Joint Resolution 38 outlines what can only be described as a failure by the agencies to understand clear direction from Congress and to dutifully recognize basic tenets of due process, needlessly resulting in a cloud on title for both the Alaska Railroad and its neighbors along the right-of-way. There is no way a bill quietly annexing private property rights, especially without any notice or compensation, would have passed Congress in 1982. You only have to read the plain language of ARTA to know that – the transfer of “rail properties of the Alaska Railroad” over privately owned land only included the “Federal interest” in those lands. If the federal government did not own it, it was not included in the transfer. There is no canon of statutory construction, or even common sense reading, that could argue an unconstitutional taking of private property rights was the intent of Congress.

The intent was to transfer the federally owned Alaska Railroad's existing assets, which can be clearly noted throughout the Act itself and the record. Where the underlying estate was federally owned, as well, the issue became how much of an interest to pass along in the right-of-way over those lands, which is spelled out in the Act. The federal government obviously had sufficient proprietary interest in the transfer of rail properties – defined in ARTA as federally held rights, titles, and interests – which were directed to be transferred; but, nowhere in ARTA did Congress authorize the transfer of privately owned property interests, nor could it do so in such a cavalier and vague manner as is being suggested.

I am committed to working with my colleagues to see this situation resolved for all concerned. If you have any questions or require assistance in this effort, please do not hesitate to let me or my staff know.

Sincerely,


DON YOUNG
Congressman for All Alaska