



Courtesy of Walter Hickel

‘I Envision Construction of A Railroad Around the World’

Walter J. Hickel was twice elected Alaska’s governor, serving as the state’s second governor, 1966-69, and again in 1990-94; he served for nearly two years as President Richard Nixon’s first Secretary of the Interior (1969-70).

At age 88, Hickel is viewed outside the United States as one of America’s senior statesmen for his unceasing commitment to economically develop the world.

Hickel was interviewed by EIR’s Richard Freeman on June 17 and July 24.

EIR: You have long been in the forefront of the effort to bring into existence the revolutionary Bering Strait rail and tunnel project. This would connect the rail systems of the United States and Russia, and link them to those of Asia, Europe, and the Americas. How would this improve the physical economy of the world?

Hickel: The Bering Strait rail and tunnel project can help enhance and expand prosperity for the 21st Century by linking the world’s greatest industrial nations with the vast untapped mineral resources of the Arctic.

To the south of Russia, the nations of the Far East are bringing their tremendous populations out of abject poverty by expanding their industrial capacity at a remarkable pace. But they urgently need natural resources. To the south of Alaska and Canada, stands the continental United States, with the greatest economy on Earth, and it too badly needs resources. Building a corridor, linked across the Bering Strait, will provide access to our Arctic resources of oil, gas, precious minerals of all kinds, and freshwater. This vital link will greatly enhance the prosperity of the world.

EIR: During the 19th and 20th Centuries, the United States built the Transcontinental Railroad, and Russia built the Trans-Siberian Railroad. Each project unified its country, and imparted to the economy productivity and development. What great projects do you see as necessary?

Hickel: I would build one or many pipelines to carry freshwater from the North to the dry and vulnerable South. I have long advocated that Alaska take the lead with two 20-inch-diameter concrete pipelines, placed side-by-side on the continental shelf, carrying freshwater from the

mouth of one of our great rivers down the coast to thirsty California. Such a project would have little to no environmental impact and could help millions of people for less than \$1 per day per person. The Russians could also export water from their mighty rivers to other nations that desperately need it.

I would also build a 48-inch-diameter natural gas pipeline to run from the North Slope of Alaska 800 miles south to Valdez, paralleling the trans-Alaska oil pipeline. This pipeline will provide massive amounts of clean LNG [Liquefied Natural Gas] from a secure environment to the U.S. West Coast and the Far East.

I envision the construction of a railroad around the world. Travel is now the world’s number-one industry, and such a trip would be the most coveted of all travel accomplishments. This would include a tunnel across the Bering Strait which can accommodate both pleasure travel and especially the movement of resources and power.

EIR: You fought for Alaska to become a state, and were responsible for its creation as a state in a specific form. This battle intensified during the 1940s and 1950s, and succeeded, when on Jan. 3, 1959, President Eisenhower signed the Congressional bill that made Alaska the 49th state of the Union.

Hickel: In 1952, they were going to make Alaska a state, and the bill was going to give us only 3 million acres of land, which is nothing out of the almost 400 million acres that is the state’s land area. And it gave us no resources or anything for Alaska. I’ll never forget, I flew to Washington—I was just a kid—my wife went with me, and we had no money. I said, “I want to see the leaders of the Senate. We can’t have a bill like the one proposed.”

So in 1952, I saw Sen. [Robert] Taft [R-Ohio], who was the most powerful man in the Senate, and he was busy. He said, “Young man, how much land do you think you need for Alaska?” I blurted out, “100 million acres,” and I didn’t have a nickel’s worth [of knowledge] at the time about how much we had. But Senator Taft re-committed that bill, and he included a 100 million acres entitlement as part of the bill.

Then, in 1954, President Eisenhower supported a plan



Courtesy of Forum International

Former Alaska Gov. Walter Hickel has led a decades-long fight for a “railroad around the world”; he is shown here, April 24, 2007, addressing a conference in Moscow, on “A Transcontinental Eurasia-America Transport Link via the Bering Strait,” for world megaprojects as an alternative to war.

that, to win statehood, we had to agree that only the southern, most populated part of Alaska would become a state. The rest would be set aside in an immense military reserve for national security purposes. A delegation of 50 of us flew to D.C., but the White House would only let 16 of us attend a meeting with the President. Only I and one other were allowed to speak. Johnny Butrovich and I told the President, in no uncertain terms, “Mr. President, you can’t do this. We need this land. We need these resources.” We got pretty hot. The President’s face got red, and finally he turned to me and said, “Well I’m glad, young man, you think I’m an American.” But we won.

EIR: In 1967, you played a crucial role as Governor of Alaska, in the development of the oil field in Prudhoe Bay, on the North Slope of Alaska. You pushed for the oil field’s final development, and getting the oil from there down into the United States’ lower 48 states.

Hickel: That’s exactly right. I had to make it happen. The oil companies were leaving the Slope. They had hit only dry holes, and there was no way to get the oil to market even if they did find it. Only Atlantic Richfield Oil was left, and they wouldn’t have drilled Prudhoe Bay if I hadn’t forced them to.

It is a matter of history. In 1967, I said to Harry Jamison, ARCO’s head geologist—after he said they, too, were stopping their exploration and leaving the Slope—“You drill or I will.”

Jamison said, “Governor, you will?” And I said, “You’re damn right I will. It is our land and our oil.”

So they changed their minds and found the largest oil field in the history of North America. I announced that there exist 40 billion barrels of oil there. It shocked him and it shocked President Johnson. Later Harry confirmed that 40 billion number and said they would get 20 billion out. So far, they have exported 15 billion, and they haven’t really explored the great oil potential we have.

EIR: Alaska derives approximately 80% of its budget revenue from a combination of taxes and royalties on the oil?

Hickel: Yes, yes, it does.

EIR: In 1977, when the Alaska Pipeline, whose origin is at Prudhoe Bay, and goes to Valdez, was completed, oil was then shipped to the continental U.S.?

Hickel: Yes. And these great resources come from the commons—lands commonly owned by all Alaskans. I teach “the commons.” It’s a concept that needs to be understood worldwide. Eighty-four percent of the Earth’s surface, including the oceans, is owned in common. How are we going to care for it and benefit from it? I’ll ask you one thing: Who owns the oceans? Not General Motors. We do. All people do. Who owns the Arctic? The Antarctic? We do. Who owns space? We do.

I did not go to college, but I’ll tell you, I’m educating the world on this. They are starting to catch on real strong, especially in Africa. Africa is a very rich continent with very poor people. Once they understand the commons, there will be no legitimate reason for poverty.

EIR: You have expressed great concern for the underdevelopment that has been forced upon Africa and the way this destroys its people. You’ve said you want to bring water and extend an electricity grid to Africa.

Hickel: I’ve been working on that.

One of my sons served as a medical missionary in Africa for 15 years. While he was there, I visited him three different years, and each time he showed me much of that continent. It reminded me of Alaska when I first arrived here, long before we became a state. We were a territory, and terribly exploited by outside economic interests. We were poor

people living on rich land—the same as in many African nations.

My hope is that the lessons we have learned in Alaska, by writing a constitution that guarantees that our commonly owned resources must be used for the “maximum benefit of our people,” may be helpful to the people of Africa. If you managed the commons for the benefit of the people, and not some oligarchs, you could eliminate poverty from this Earth.

EIR: Have you thought about desalinating seawater, using nuclear power plants?

Hickel: You can do that, but that is expensive.

EIR: Scientists are making it economical.

Hickel: Anyhow, ideas are more powerful than money.

EIR: You were born in Kansas; how did you go to live in Alaska?

Hickel: In 1940, I was looking to get to Australia, but I wasn't old enough to get my own passport, so I asked where I could go without one. Someone listed off the places I could go, and the last place he mentioned was Alaska. I bought a ticket. I had never thought about Alaska. It was August 1940.

I asked the White Steamship Company, “How far up in Alaska can I go?” and they said, “We can take you to Seward.” I arrived there on Nov. 3. One guy gave me a sleeping bag and a place to sleep. Another gave me \$20 so I could buy a railroad ticket to Anchorage. So that is how I got to Anchorage.

EIR: What did you do for work when you arrived?

Hickel: I washed dishes! [laughing]

EIR: Did you get into any type of industry?

Hickel: No. I got a job at the railroad. Nothing was going on then, and I didn't have any money. I arrived here in Anchorage with 37¢. The cold didn't bother me. I worked in the railroad yard as a helper in the shop.

EIR: Mr. LaRouche has proposed the Bering Strait rail-tunnel project from the standpoint of a world land-bridge, which creates corridors of high levels of economic development.

Hickel: I've supported connecting the continents by rail. People say, “Why do you need a railroad around the world?” And I say, “Why did you need a railroad from New York to California?” This is going to change the world, and it is easy to do.

EIR: Governor Hickel, what will it take to build the Bering Strait rail and tunnel project?

Hickel: All it takes is a decision.