



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

August 26, 2019

Dr. Jim Johnsen
President
University of Alaska
Butrovich Bldg, Ste 202
2025 Yukon Drive
Fairbanks, AK 99775-5000

RE: University of Alaska Museum of the North funding

Dear President Johnsen:

On behalf of the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) I write to express support for the University of Alaska Museum of the North (UAMN) in the face of the recently agreed-to cut of state funding to University of Alaska. UAMN serves as the primary federal and state repository for cultural and natural history collections in Alaska and therefore has a legal and ethical obligation to care for these collections which are held in public trust. Additionally, the State of Alaska and the University of Alaska Board of Regents have a fiduciary responsibility to safeguard these one-of-a-kind collections.

SAA is an international organization that, since its founding in 1934, has been dedicated to the research about and interpretation and protection of the archaeological heritage of the Americas. With more than 7,500 members, SAA represents professional archaeologists in colleges and universities, museums, government agencies, and the private sector. SAA has members in all 50 states as well as many other nations around the world.

We understand that difficult decisions must be made, but urge you to consider smart cuts that don't imperil outside funding streams, community and tribal relationships, and irreplaceable collections. We ask that you keep in mind that any cut in state funding will have ramifications on the museum, its mission, and the irreplaceable collections it cares for. For example, in FY2019, it received just over a million dollars in state funding, or 27% of its overall budget. Outside grants and contracts account for 30%. It is state-funded positions at the museum that are responsible for writing grants and bringing in contracts, so reducing state funding in turn will hamper the museum's ability to secure outside sources of revenue and document matching funds (a requirement of many grants).

In addition to harming external revenues, cutting the budget of the Museum of the North harms community and tribal relationships. The Museum of the North is a leader in northern cultural and natural history research and education. It is also, according to the Saving our Past: Planning for

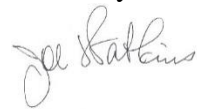
our Future report, a “top visitor destination”, which makes it an important contribution to heritage tourism. Importantly, UAMN is also a leader in Alaska in implementing the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), 25 U.S.C. §3001-13 (1990), 104 Stat. 3042, P.L. 101-106 and subsequent amendments. NAGPRA is a piece of federal legislation passed in 1990 which addresses the rights of lineal descendants and Indian tribes (which includes Alaska Natives and Alaska Native corporations), to Native American cultural items including human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony. UAMN staff work to keep the museum and the university in compliance with NAGPRA and failure to do so can result in a civil penalty issued by the Secretary of the Interior as well as harm to relationships with Alaska’s many native communities.

Finally, the Museum will not be able to care and maintain and display its collections without an appropriate amount of state funding. The UAMN archaeology collection consists of over 5,000 accessions, representing more than 750,000 cataloged artifacts. The collections represent the entire archaeological record of Alaska from the earliest sites dating from more than 14,000 years ago to 20th century historic sites. They span the entire geographic range of Alaska from Utqiagvik to Ketchikan and from Eagle to St. Lawrence Island, providing an internationally recognized resource for research into the entire range of human occupation of the Arctic. Notable collections include firearms, gold extraction technology and equipment, mountaineering gear, and household items, as well as Leonhard Seppala's sled dog racing trophies and Ben Eielson's airplane. This heritage could be lost or destroyed if there are not sufficient museum resources.

The Museum of the North archaeology collection helps tell the story of the peoples of Alaska, from 14,000 years ago up to and including the historic past. It is imperative that the cuts in funding to the museum be handled in such a way as to minimize the diminishment of these invaluable cultural resources.

We strongly urge the University of Alaska system to provide adequate funding to the Museum of the North.

Sincerely,



Joe E. Watkins, Ph.D., RPA
President

Cc: Chancellor White
Provost Prakash