



CONGRESS OF RUSSIAN AMERICANS, INC.

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June 26, 2020

Honorable Mayor Gary Paxton,
Assembly Members and Department Heads
City and Borough of Sitka
100 Lincoln Street
Sitka, AK 99835

Dear Mayor Paxton and Members of the Assembly:

I am writing on behalf of the Congress of Russian Americans (CRA), a national organization established in 1973, with thousands of members throughout the USA, primarily American citizens of Russian ancestry and heritage. The CRA is a recognized voice of Russian Americans. Our members have contributed to enriching this nation, and the CRA Hall of Fame includes a Nobel laureate alongside many Russian-American innovators, artists, and leaders in humanities, arts, and sciences. The CRA stands staunchly in support of the American ideals of democracy, civil rights, human dignity, and the rule of law.

It has come to our attention that a rally of citizens, who are against the removal of the monument of Alaska's first governor, Alexander Baranov, was held in Sitka, Alaska on June 23. We also understand that the Sitka Assembly will be meeting sometime in the near future to discuss the fate of the monument. While we understand a collection of signatures for removal of the monument cannot determine the fate of any historical monument, as we, too, could have had all of your Sitka constituents, who are against the removal, as well as our members throughout the US sign a petition, we trust that this issue is resolved by fair judgment and common sense, instead of bending to the demands of radical activists.

The monument stands more than just a statue to Baranov, the first Russian governor of Alaska, but to a period of history of Alaska; one that cannot and should not be erased. The Russian American Company was able to get along with the native peoples of Alaska, and Baranov was able to negotiate with them and find a compromise. When relations between Russian settlers and indigenous people were strained, he found a way to coexist together in peace.

The monument also was gifted to Sitka at a time of peace and reconciliation between Russia and the Tlingit community. It was symbolic of the end of the Cold War, and a time where our nations were bridging cultures, diplomacy and building unity and peaceful relations. As Russian Americans who came before and during the Cold War, we know, too well, how ethnic discrimination can ignite emotions and unfair perception of people.

We ask that this not be the case, and that removal of the monument is not the first choice, as it will not only cause more rift within the citizens, but, most assuredly affect the tourism in Sitka, that has long been a Russian connection to the city. However, should the decision be made to remove the monument, we support a compromise solution to move the Baranov monument to a different location, such as the Bishop House or another prominently historical location, where the monument can still be viewed and not defaced.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to email me at: crahq.sf@gmail.com or call on my personal mobile phone: 1-415-999-7152. We welcome any favorable compromise in your decision.

Sincerely,

Natalie G. Sabelnik,
President, Congress of Russian Americans