

# Reasons to support Education Fund

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for the Tundra Times

It seems like the extreme opposition has the loudest voice when it comes to talking about a savings plan for education. I am hopeful that all Alaskan voters will have the chance to be heard on this.

## Unangan Tunukun The Aleuts Speak

## OPINION

To me the issue is really pretty simple, we're going to need the money — education is our top job.

Those are powerful considerations, and when you take the time to dissect the opposition, reasons to support creation of the Education Fund make a great deal more sense than the excuses to oppose it.

Let's take the arguments one by one.

*It's a raid on the Permanent Fund.* Wrong. The Permanent Fund is protected by the constitution, as will be the Education Fund. Only profits of each can be spent or reinvested.

*It wrecks the dividend.* The dividend will stabilize at about \$1,000 while the Education Fund is built up.

*It won't be enough.* That's probably

true, although no one is certain what future education costs will be because it's based on how many students we have. The Education Fund is a basic source of support. If it isn't enough, then it's up to education advocates to try to get more. That's what they do now.

*It'll be too much.* That's probably not true. The Education Fund will generate about \$700 million by the year 2000. Today's education costs are \$600 million, and that doesn't count local contributions.

*Dedicated funds are a bad idea.* Our constitutional delegates decided the legislature would get to control where the money goes. That theory would work great if we were confident that spending decisions were based purely on merit and need, but that's not how it works in real life. If we want to make sure the Education Fund goes to education, then we have to guarantee that through the constitution.

*It won't guarantee quality.* The education savings account is just a funding mechanism. It won't guarantee anything but a steady source of revenue for an obligation that will be with us forever. People, not bank accounts, are responsible for demanding and monitoring quality.

*There won't be any accountability.*

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Why not? As mentioned, the Education Fund probably won't fulfill all needs. The education community will have to justify their requests to secure adequate funding just as every other program the state delivers. And, it still will be up to the legislature and local school boards to decide how education dollars should be spent. Accountability, like quality is up to citizens.

*It's just more money for government.* The Education Fund will pro-

vide replacement dollars for lost oil revenue. Within 10 years the state will bring in only about half or two-thirds of what we do today. That's a serious bite out of a budget that goes directly back into Alaska.

*We'll always come up with the money for education.* When we hit the skids three years ago, school budgets were cut 10 percent across the board, some schools closed, some never opened, and "extra" programs were cut. Just because the constitution requires we provide education, it doesn't guarantee us the resources to do that.

*We don't need to do this now.* Last year Prudhoe Bay passed its peak. It's running down. In 10 years we'll have about one-third the oil we do now and that's bad news because 85 percent of our money comes from oil.

Permanent funding for schools makes a lot of sense. Most of all, it will make a more secure future for our youth. No argument's more powerful than that.