

Hickel signs rural sanitation resolution

JUNEAU - According to a news release dated April 29, Gov. Walter J. Hickel joined the Legislature in urging the federal government to recognize the dire water and sanitation conditions in rural Alaska identified by the Rural Sanitation Task Force and to commit federal resources to help improve the life-threatening problems.

"I hope this resolution will raise federal awareness of the magnitude of the water and sewer problems in our villages, and get us working together to tackle this critical issue head-on," said Hickel as he signed Senate Joint Resolution 25.

The task force found that currently in 135 rural villages, buckets and pit privies are the sole means of sewage collection

and disposal. Water must be hauled by residents from watering points or from creeks and rivers. Raw sewage lies in open pits and bunkers throughout residential sites. Waterborne diseases such as hepatitis A and meningitis occur at alarming rates.

The passage of this resolution becomes timely because the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs will hold its first hearing specifically on the water and sanitation needs of rural Alaskans today. Alaska Senator Frank Murkowski, a member of the committee, said the hearing offers Alaskans the best opportunity they have had in years to bring the issue to the attention of Congress and federal agencies.