

# ***How UNION NOW Inspired the Campaign to Bring Alaska and Hawaii into the Union***

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January 17, 1986 Honorable Clarence K. Streit

My dear Clarence:

I am indebted to your Washington associates for reminding me that you will celebrate your 90th birthday on the 21st. What a privilege it is to add my congratulations and felicitations to those you will receive from all over the world! Also, to express my deep gratitude for the inspiration I received, in 1945, when I first read *UNION NOW* and the action that reading stimulated. Should you find this latter statement somewhat puzzling, the following brief excerpt from the book *You and Your Congressman*, by our mutual friend, House Majority Leader Jim Wright, MC, should clear the air:

One day during the waning months of World War II, the skipper of the Navy troopship ROTANIN finished a long, tedious watch on the bridge and went below to browse through the ship's library. So began the story of how George H. Lehleitner, a quiet, soft-spoken man, came to be described as 'the father of Alaskan statehood.' Although Lehleitner himself modestly disclaims any such title, the fact is that he did play the central role in bringing statehood not only to Alaska, but to Hawaii as well...

The book he ran across in the ship's library that day was Clarence Streit's *UNION NOW*. The young naval captain was impressed by Streit's prediction that still greater conflicts would follow World War II unless the older



democracies forged themselves into a 'Union of the Free' whose overwhelming strength would discourage—or, if necessary, crush by force—any future would-be Hitlers.

The brilliance of your idea, Clarence, and its enormous significance for free men everywhere, struck me with great impact and continued to occupy my mind. Meanwhile, my ship made a stop at Pearl Harbor, (my initial visit to Hawaii), where my "education" on the intolerable limitations of Hawaii's territorial status first took root.

You and I first met in New Orleans shortly after my return to civil life in 1946. You may recall I told you that reading *UNION NOW* had been a most stimulating experience, but, it was my personal conviction that I could best serve the end you wished to achieve by first helping Hawaii and Alaska attain statehood. Because the evils of their territorial status were so obvious, I naively assumed the task could be accomplished in a few years. Instead, it required 12!

Statehood for the two Territories had become a Holy Grail... for I was deeply convinced that only the equality it would provide could cleanse the U.S. of the charge that it had two classes of citizenship: first class for the residents of the 48 mainland states, and a decidedly inferior one for those Americans who lived in Alaska and Hawaii. For although they paid the same federal taxes and were required to obey all federal laws, (including those which drafted their sons and husbands in both World Wars), they were denied voting representation *in the Congress which made those laws*. Nor did they have the right to choose their own Governor; he was a political appointee of Washington!

Moreover—and of enormous significance to all Federal Unionists—was this factor: One of the key objections which had delayed Congressional approval of statehood for both Alaska and Hawaii was the widely expressed belief that their non-contiguity with the other states would, somehow, prevent them from ever becoming fully functioning segments of the U.S. Of course, our experience since they became states has been just the opposite; both Alaska and Hawaii have had an explosive influx of tourists from the "Lower 48," with the result that billions of tourist dollars that would have been spent on foreign travel have remained in the U.S. Statehood has also enabled Alaska to begin the development of its huge storehouse of natural resources. *In 1981, for example, its production of crude oil was the largest of any state in the Union, whereas, in 1950, while still a Territory, its oil production was 0!* Has this help lower *your* fuel costs? Indeed it has!

But, it remains my deep conviction that the greatest contributions of Alaska and Hawaii are yet to come: Someday the mature democracies of the world will realize that their best interests—perhaps their very existence—will lie in embracing your dream, Clarence. And when that day does come, my venerated friend, I believe with all my heart and with all my mind, that the examples of Alaska and Hawaii, functioning successful as viable and essential segments of our own federal union, will help to convince the doubtful, (especially those in America), that the oceans and land masses which separate us are only artificial barriers. The real barriers which separate men from each other are radical differences in philosophy...especially the philosophy of government.

Those who share our belief that government should be the servant of man—rather than the other way around—have nothing to fear from differences in customs, tradition and language... for these, too, are barriers that will yield to modern transportation and communication. Be fearful only of fundamental differences in the philosophy of government... differences which endeavor to make man its servant, instead of its master.

It is but natural, Clarence, should you be disappointed that your inspired dream of a Union of the Free has not yet become a reality. When that day does come it will be altogether fitting that you shall be honored by the world of free men as the architect of the grand plan.

Meanwhile, it appears to me entirely proper that you should be honored—and take comfort in—the fact that an important first step has been taken toward the realization of your dream. Our mutual friend, Jim Wright, has credited me with having played the central role in bringing statehood to Alaska and Hawaii. My own view is that many people deserve credit for that accomplishment...and they certainly include Jim Wright, whose role was a major one!

And this I know: My own initial inspiration was derived, as Jim so accurately reported, from the reading of *UNION NOW!* So, Clarence, to the extent that I was the fuse which led to the powder-keg of

statehood for Alaska and Hawaii, it certainly was your brilliant mind and your pen which applied the match of inspiration to that fuse!

May God grant you and Jeanne many more years together and may it be your good fortune to live to see your dream come true!

Most sincerely yours,  
Geo. H. Lehleitner