

University of Oklahoma College of Law

## University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons

---

American Indian and Alaskan Native Documents in the Congressional Serial Set: 1817-1899

---

12-10-1888

**Letter from the Secretary of the Interior, in reference to Senate resolution of December 5, 1888, relative to alleged personal outrages in Alaska.**

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.law.ou.edu/indianserialset>



Part of the [Indigenous, Indian, and Aboriginal Law Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

S. Exec. Doc. No. 13, 50th Cong., 2nd Sess. (1888)

This Senate Executive Document is brought to you for free and open access by University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in American Indian and Alaskan Native Documents in the Congressional Serial Set: 1817-1899 by an authorized administrator of University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [Law-LibraryDigitalCommons@ou.edu](mailto:Law-LibraryDigitalCommons@ou.edu).

## LETTER

FROM

# THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR,

IN REFERENCE TO

*Senate resolution of December 5, 1888, relative to alleged personal outrages in Alaska.*

---

DECEMBER 10, 1888.—Laid on the table and ordered to be printed.

---

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,  
*Washington, December 8, 1888.*

SIR: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of a resolution passed by the Senate on the 5th of December, instant, of which the following is a copy:

*Resolved*, That the Secretary of the Interior be directed to communicate to the Senate what information, if any, there is in the Department in reference to alleged outrages and restraint of liberty committed in Alaska upon Indian females and other persons, and what steps, if any, have been taken by the Department to protect the persons of female residents in Alaska from outrage, violence, and restraint of liberty;

And in reply to state that this Department possesses no information in reference to alleged outrages and restraints of liberty committed upon Alaskan Indian females or other persons, of any recent character, nor has attention been otherwise invited to the subject than by late newspaper reports of uncertain value. It should be added that, notwithstanding the nominal superintendency of this Department over the Territories, no actual authority is reposed by any statute which would enable it to investigate or take any action in redress of such evils. Nor has any appropriation provided the Department with any means applicable.

As the law now stands, the only agency which this Department possesses, through which to affect the condition of the Alaskan native population, is the Bureau of Education, which has superintendency of schools in that Territory. "For the industrial and primary education of the children of school age in the Territory of Alaska, without reference to race," there is an appropriation for the current year of \$40,000; but no officer within the Territory is subject to any requirement of law to inform this Department in respect to the condition of the Indian people, except in connection with the school service; and no officer is otherwise under its direction or control. The statute of May 17, 1874, creating a civil government for Alaska, directs the governor to make his annual report to the President, thus distinguishing this Territory from the usage which has prevailed with regard to the others. The governor has hitherto, however, observed the custom and transmitted a report to this Department.

Accordingly, on the 14th of July last, he, as well as the governors of the other Territories, was requested to forward as soon as practicable, and not later than the 20th of October, a report upon the affairs, the progress, and development of the Territory for the year ending June 30, 1888, and among the topics upon which report was especially requested was the "condition of the Indians in the Territory." On the 10th of October the governor transmitted a preliminary report, explaining that having then but lately returned from a cruise of 10,000 miles in Alaskan waters, he had found it impossible to complete his formal annual report in time to comply with the request of the Department referred to; nor has his annual report yet been received. In his interesting preliminary exhibit, in speaking of the condition of the native people, he says:

I can add nothing to what I have already reported in regard to the condition of the so-called Indians in Alaska. The natives in the southeastern section are a self-sustaining people, industrious, generally peaceable and well-behaved, and not at all averse to the efforts that are being made for their civilization and education. In all that part of the Territory dominated by the Alaska Commercial Company, save on the Seal Islands, the creole and native people are little if any better than serfs of that powerful corporation.

This indicates no recent change in the general condition of the native Alaskan population, and tends to qualify confidence in rumors springing from the hasty observation of the traveler, whose visual lens is proverbially of high magnifying power. I have, however, transmitted to the governor a copy of the resolution of the Senate and a specimen of the newspaper reports, with a request that he will secure and furnish such information as will enable a more satisfactory understanding of the alleged evils. Upon receipt of that report I shall transmit it to the Senate for further response to this resolution.

In reply to the second inquiry of the resolution, no steps have been taken by the Department looking to the object named. As already observed, neither authority of law nor pecuniary means are provided the Department by Congress for any such purpose.

Very respectfully,

WM. F. VILAS,  
*Secretary.*

The PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE OF THE SENATE.