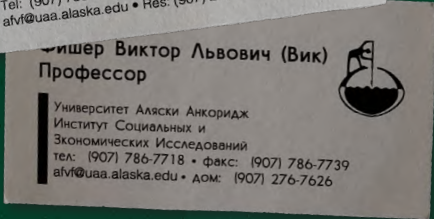
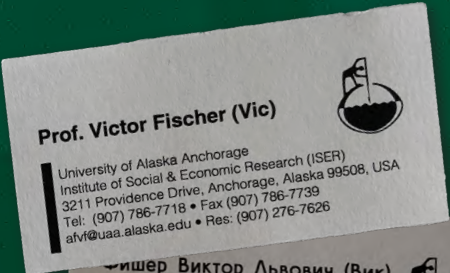
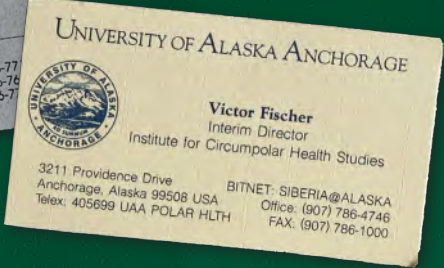
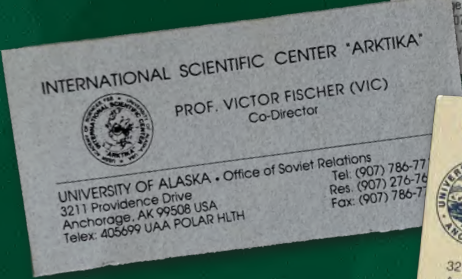
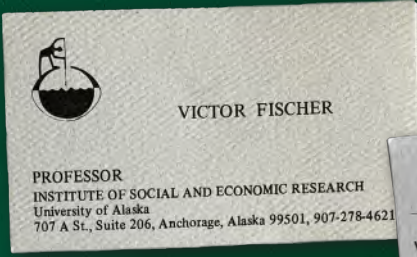




*Vic Fischer*

**Vic Fischer**  
at the University of Alaska



Cover: Lee Gorsuch (ISER director 1976-1994) and Vic Fischer (ISEGR director 1966-1976) at a going-away party for ISER director Jack Kruse (right) in 1997. Courtesy: ISER



*Vic Fischer walking to the venue of Diane Hirshberg's wedding, which he officiated in 2006.*



I met Vic when I started at the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) in 2003. I am honored to follow in his footsteps as ISER's 12<sup>th</sup> director. Vic was the first. As a junior faculty member, getting to know Vic provided me invaluable insight into the state. I was lucky enough to have an office right by his for my first few years and would take advantage of

any opportunity to listen to his stories, opinions and guidance. He not only provided professional advice but also served as the officiant at my wedding, a role he has served graciously for many Alaska couples.

Cementing relationships is a running theme in Vic's work, and we see the results at UAA. He built a strong and lasting community of scholars at ISER. He encouraged collaboration with others outside Alaska and outside the U.S. As the visionary behind the creation of UAA's American Russian Center, he nurtured relationships with the Russian Far East.

One reason I got to know Vic well: he never really left ISER. Throughout his many endeavors, he continued a connection with institute researchers. He received the honor of Director Emeritus in 1996, complete with an office at ISER, and he has worked from that office for many years.

Vic's energy, vision and statewide and international connections mean that he is lauded by many – rightly so. But we will always lay claim to a special relationship with Vic, one based on enduring respect and gratefulness for his dedication to understanding more about the people of the state of Alaska – and the impact that he has made over the last six decades.

**Diane Hirshberg, Director  
Institute of Social and Economic Research**



## The Institute of Everything

Vic was living in Washington, D.C. in 1966 when he was recruited back to Alaska to become the first director of the Institute of Social, Economic and Government Research (ISEGR), then located in Fairbanks. His experience as Anchorage's first city planner, delegate to the Alaska Constitutional Convention, territorial legislator and assistant administrator of the U.S. Housing and Home Finance Administration made him an ideal candidate.

In 1965, Vic worked with George Rogers, founder of ISEGR, on a grant application to the Ford Foundation to develop the capability of the Institute to research social and economic issues. He finalized the proposal in 1966, and funding came through in 1967 with an unprecedented amount of \$550,000.

The grant provided a foundation for building the Institute, which grew rapidly to address a broad array of issues, including community development, Alaska Native leadership, health, education, petroleum and other resources development, public finance, environment and many other topics. Indeed, some began affectionately to call ISER the "Institute of Everything."



is<sup>er</sup>



*Eventually, "government" was dropped from the Institute's name. It retained its original logo, designed by Iñupiaq artist Ron Senungetuk in the 1960s. Senungetuk created a woodcut of the logo in 1975.*

REGIONAL REVIEWS OF RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT  
IN THE CIRCUMPOLAR NORTH

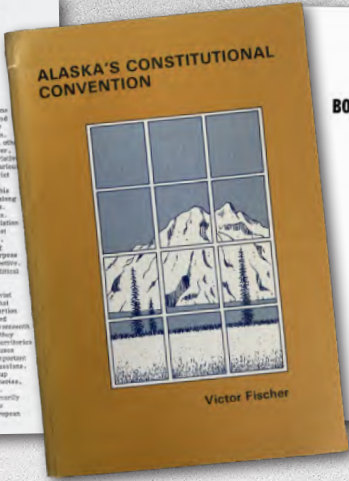
Soviet Northern Development

Victor Fischer  
Institute of Social and Economic Research  
University of Alaska, Fairbanks, AK 99701

In approaching a discussion of Soviet northern development, one sometimes finds it very difficult to distinguish between truth and hearsay. It all depends on whose eye vision is and on what your particular perspective is. I am here in the unfortunate position, within the same quadrant, of speaking on a country. A region, other than my own; I'd much rather be talking about Alaska. However, like my own region, the Soviet north is made up of many subregions. For one thing, this portion of the Soviet Union, according to various definitions, constitutes about half of the entire USSR. The Soviet north is larger than all of the United States, including Alaska. It is larger than Canada and seven times the size of Alaska. The vast region stretches 4,583 miles (7,393 km), if you measure along the Arctic Circle from the Russian border to the Bering Strait. The population of the Soviet north is twenty times that of Alaska. Its average size above the Arctic Circle, Thompson, Lake a population roughly equal to all of Alaska. Sitka, one of the northernmost cities in Alaska, contains almost as many people as Anchorage, Alaska, which is much further south. I could continue listing these kinds of statistics and comparative facts here, but my purpose here is to attempt to put Soviet northern development in perspective, to show briefly the historical, economic, and to some extent political aspects of Soviet northern development.

One must immediately recognize that the development of the Soviet north has taken place over a much longer period of time than that in the American north. The Russians reached the White Sea portion of the European north by the eleventh century; they had crossed the Urals by the fifteenth century, and by the middle of the seventeenth century they had reached the Pacific. Four times, of course, they landed across to Alaska. The occupation and conquest of new territories in these days occurred at much a faster rate than for the cause of empire. Yet the pace of empire was in these days a very important thing. All nations that could not move faster were and the Russians, rather than going for overseas empire, simply started filling up their own land mass. In Russia's European north, timber, fisheries, and some mining prepared for overpopulation and depletion.

In Siberia, northern land acquisition and settlement was primarily for, then timber and gold. Over agriculture was developed to some extent as early as the 1850's, when overpopulation in European



**BOROUGH GOVERNMENT IN ALASKA**

A Study of State-Level Politics

by  
Thomas A. Bruneau  
and  
Victor Fischer

Institute of Social, Economic and Government Research  
University of Alaska  
College, Alaska 99501

ISEGR Paper No. 26  
March 1973  
Price: \$5.00

*In addition to leading the Institute and recruiting self-directed researchers, Fischer wrote reports on subjects like borough government, regional inflation, land planning and resource development in the circumpolar North. He testified to Congress on how regional planning could solve social and economic problems. His first-hand account of Alaska's Constitutional Convention was published in 1975.*

*Letter from Vic to George Rogers, ISEGR founder, after three weeks as Institute Director. From the Victor Fischer papers, Archives and Special Collections, UAA/APU Consortium Library.*

INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND GOVERNMENT RESEARCH

September 13, 1966

Dear George -

It has been only three weeks, but feel as if I've been here for three years. More than before, am convinced we can really accomplish something. If one can keep sane during the initial period, I really was not quite aware of the tremendous bridge-building job that has to be done to tie together the various parts of the university that have some relation to what we are about. There are so many people, with so many relevant interests and potential contributions that it could be a full time job just getting acquainted and sharing ideas. Have hired a new senior research assistant to help out with this job - gal, Amy Paige, BA sociology Vassar, MA in Social Science from Maxwell School, major in sovietology; has done some research for Albert Lepovosky on his national planning study, was with his commission in Wash. Ran into her while in Anchorage. She had

... I came on board, having talked to ... problems, community

# Change in the North: People, Petroleum and Politics

Under Fischer, ISEGR organized the 20th annual conference of the Alaska chapter of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1969. The theme of the conference addressed the biggest issue of the time: the 1968 Prudhoe Bay oil discovery and how its development could impact the environment, economy and people of Alaska.

It was very successful in terms of attendees and the amount of broad media coverage it garnered. More than 1,000 people gathered for the three-day event, including government officials, national resource economists, oil industry executives, international scientists and conservationists.

It also drew attention when U.S. Senator Ted Stevens unexpectedly set aside his prepared luncheon remarks to take aim at conservationists. In the photo below, Vic, Ted Stevens and University Vice President Don Theophilus are standing in front of the conference banner.



ARCTIC COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Dated 1970

ISEGR contributed to the public knowledge of potential impacts of the oil industry on the state, work it has continued over the decades.

The prospect of developing oil also brought up questions of whether large settlements would be needed on the North Slope. In 1970, Fischer convened a brainstorming session to include ISEGR researchers, other experts and Tom Gaskell, the scientific adviser to British Petroleum.

They discussed questions like the need for and function of Arctic communities, development and trends in other Arctic nations, the future of Native communities, current and future technologies for Arctic living, and economic, transportation, social, physical and other aspects of northern settlements.

Gaskell appreciated the insights, later writing that, "Vic did a very good job in leading the meeting to discuss all aspects of the problem...I don't think there is going to be any big settlement up in Prudhoe Bay; the oil operations will only call for a few hundred people and they will probably be rotated fairly frequently..."

ISEGR's exploration of Arctic communities continued into the mid-1970s through the Man in the Arctic program funded by the National Science Foundation, and it is still a significant part of ISEGR's work today.

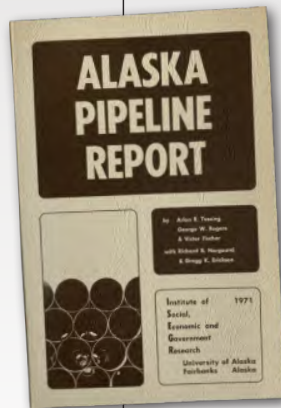
SESSION ON ARCTIC COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
JULY 2, 1970.

Invitation Sent	Name	Response
1	✓ Anderson, J.	Reply
2	✓ Armstrong, T.	YES 1
3	✓ Arnst, R.	YES 2
4	✓ <del>Baker</del> P. Johnson	3? YES
5	✓ Cohen, J.	YES 4
6	✓ Cattanach, S.	YES 5
	<del>Fischer</del>	
	✓ FINKLER, Carl	YES 6
	✓ Fischer, V.	YES 7
	✓ Gaskell, T.	YES 8
	✓ HAVELOCK, John	YES 9
	✓ Insley, W.	YES 10
	✓ [unclear]	YES 11

## Pipeline EIS

The U.S. Department of the Interior drafted an Environmental Impact Statement for the pipeline, but neglected to address social and economic aspects. In 1971, it asked ISEGR to come up with a socioeconomic analysis in just 30 days. Vic Fischer, George Rogers and Arlon Tussing wrote the report. Among other points, it predicted that

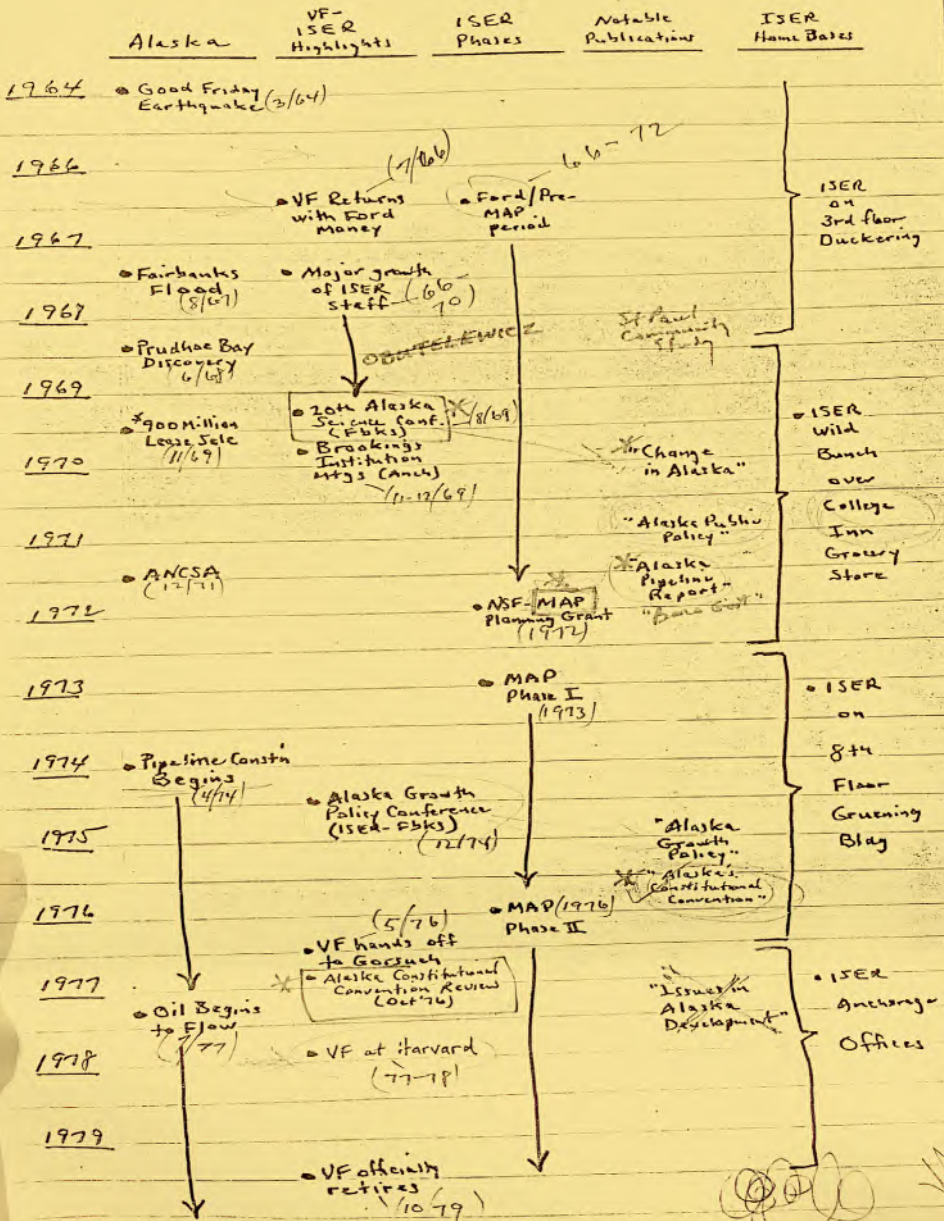
the primary engine of Alaska's economy would come from state spending of oil tax revenues and royalties, not from oil industry jobs.





# VF - ISER CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

10/10/19



When Vic officially retired from UAA in 1979, he charted this chronology of Alaska events and ISER highlights. From the Victor Fischer papers, Archives and Special Collections of the UAA/APU Consortium Library.

# Russian American connections

When the Ice Curtain suddenly fell in 1989, it allowed for increased business, cultural and academic interactions between Russia and Alaska. Vic was uniquely qualified to help lead Alaska initiatives to develop relationships between the two countries. He had grown up in Russia in the 1930s and spoke Russian. As ISER

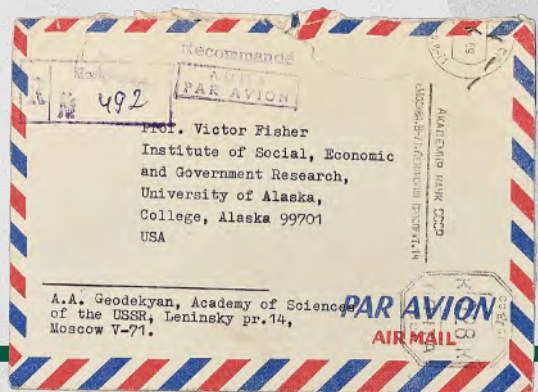
director, he had reached out to Russian academics as far back as 1969, and traveled to Russia in the 1970s during the Cold War.

University of Alaska President Donald O'Dowd asked him to return to the university to direct an office of Soviet/Russian affairs, housed at ISER.

Vic led the office for five years, with a team that developed extensive educational, scientific and support activities, mainly in the Russian Far East. They established exchanges and training for journalists, educators, Indigenous peoples, public officials and others. Vic spent a year in Moscow with his family, and then returned to ISER to pursue Russia research and exchange projects funded by the United States Information Agency, the Eurasia Foundation and the National Science Foundation.



Correspondence between Vic and A. Geodekyan of Russia's Academy of Sciences, 1969. Connections Vic made would prove valuable in establishing collaborative agreements between the U.S. and Russia decades later.





Indigenous people in Russia's far north cared for large reindeer herds. In the early 1990s, UAA's American Russian Center trained them to get the most economic gain out of their resource. Photo courtesy: John Tichotsky

“ When I think of Vic at ISER, I remember loud yelling coming down the halls of our offices in the Consortium Library building. The yelling came from Vic, and it was in Russian. It was about 1991.

I was a naïve and lowly researcher and Vic was clearly some sort of Grand Poobah. Apparently the yelling was needed to transcend the creaky phone connections to the former USSR. In any event it was loud and exuded authority. I had no doubt that when Vic yelled, important people in Russia listened.

Only after some time did I come to appreciate Vic as a truly kind and gentle soul, happy to listen but full of quiet conviction about how to improve the world, and not afraid to shout when the situation demanded. ”

– Steve Colt, ISER professor emeritus of economics and ISER director from 2007-2009

Souvenirs from some of Vic's travels to Russia's Far East regions.

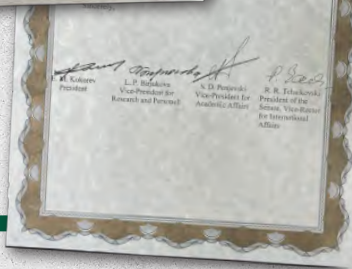
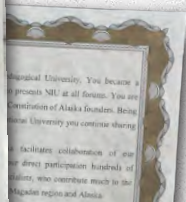
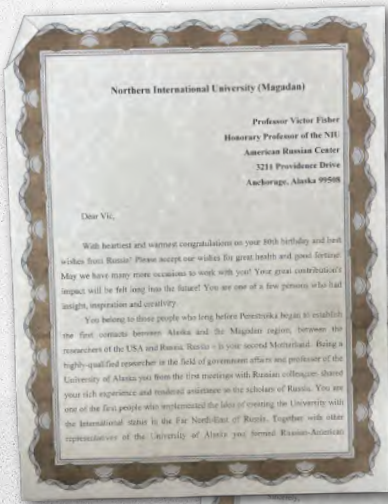


OFFICE OF RUSSIAN AFFAIRS  
University of Alaska  
3211 Providence Drive  
Anchorage, Alaska 99508 USA



Validating stamps from Arktika helped U.S. researchers cut through red tape on visits to Magadan.

During a 1990 trip to Russia, UA President Donald O'Dowd formalized many of the links Vic had negotiated to foster scientific collaboration between the two countries. One of these, the Arktika International Scientific Center, was created by Vic and Asylbek Aidaraliev, director of Russia's Institute for the Study of Biological Problems of the North, under a special arrangement between the University of Alaska and Russia's Academy of Sciences.



Officials at Northern International University in Magadan honored Vic on the occasion of his 80th birthday in 2004. "You belong to those people who long before Perestroika began to establish the first contacts between Alaska and the Magadan region... Due to your direct participation, hundreds of students and teachers became excellent specialists, who contribute much to the development of contiguous territories of the Magadan region and Alaska."



1990 trip to Russia. Top: John Tichotsky, ISER research assistant, and Vic Fischer look on as UA President O'Dowd signs an agreement with Russian officials. Bottom: Asylbek Aidaraliyev, Fischer and O'Dowd. Photos courtesy: John Tichotsky.



## University of Alaska Anchorage



In 1996, University of Alaska Statewide conferred upon Vic the status of UA Director Emeritus. The citation detailed his role at ISEGR and contributions to improving U.S. and Russia relations. It also noted his extensive contributions as a faculty member:

“From 1966 to 1979, Vic Fischer was also a professor of political science and regional planning, teaching classes in both Anchorage and Fairbanks on land use planning, regional planning, state and local government, the legislative process, the Alaska Constitution, resource development and conservation, and the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. During those years he wrote many reports and articles on Alaska’s state and local government systems, and studied and wrote on community planning and development issues... He has, over many years, done what the University of Alaska aims to do: to help Alaskans – whether students or the general public – understand change and learn how to live and prosper in changing times.”



“ Vic was committed to attracting top faculty from the best colleges and universities, which has served the institute well. This practice has continued throughout the years. His friendship with Paul Ylvisaker of the Ford Foundation created an important bridge to the National Science Foundation, which awarded ISER one of its largest social research grants. That led to the creation of a state-of-the-art economic model that has served the institute well over the past several decades.

An activist at heart, Vic left the Institute to make policy rather than study it, and his Alaska policy contributions are many and are layered on his contributions to the state’s founding constitution.

A fond memory I have of Vic was his attire, which consisted of black jeans, a button down white Oxford cloth shirt and a pair of sneaker type shoes. He kept a tie on a hanger inside his office door which he would wear to receive various dignitaries. He left his tie when he retired from the institute. ”

– Lee Gorsuch, ISER’s second and longest-serving director



Top: Vic and his wife Jane Angvik at an ISER get-together. Undated. Courtesy: ISER.

Bottom: Vic and his daughter Ruth in 2006, when he received an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from UAA. Courtesy: UAA Advancement Archives



UAA Institute of Social  
and Economic Research  
UNIVERSITY of ALASKA ANCHORAGE

**Prepared by the Institute of Social  
and Economic Research, 2022**

### **Resources/acknowledgment**

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Writing/design: Mariah Oxford, ISER/  
UAA College of Business & Public Policy

Editing/review: UAA Office of  
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