

Russian Media Distorts Comments by Alaska State Official

He never said Alaskans would live better under Moscow, but dozens of Russian news reports claim otherwise

By [Matthew Kupfer](#)

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A bald eagle looks up from eating on the ground on March 14, 2015, in Anchorage, Alaska. **AP Photo / Dan Joling**

It's nearly April, but it might as well be Christmas morning in Moscow. Yes, on the 150th anniversary of "Seward's Folly," a U.S. official today endorsed Alaska's return to Russia.

That, anyway, is how the Russian state media reported it.

According to the RIA Novosti news agency, Alaska's senior advisor for arctic policy, Craig Fleener, said that America's far north might be better developed if Russia had never sold it to the United States on March 30, 1867. Fleener reportedly observed that Russia might have

invested more in Alaska than the U.S. because of national security concerns, given the territory's proximity to Canada and the U.S. mainland.

"Therefore, it's entirely possible that the region could have been more developed, because of the security needs," Fleener allegedly said in RIA Novosti's [report](#), before adding that neither Washington, D.C., nor the population of Alaska would likely support returning the state to Russia.

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The Moscow Times contacted Fleener on Thursday, and learned that RIA Novosti — along with a dozen other Russian outlets that picked up the story — misrepresented his comments.

Asked if he thought Alaska would be more or less developed if it had remained under Moscow's control, Fleener told The Moscow Times that he answered, "Alaska is a very long distance from the developed part of Russia and therefore would *not* have likely been more developed."

Fleener then clarified that he believes Russia wouldn't have abandoned the region entirely, in light of its natural resources and importance to national defense.

The report in RIA Novosti, a news agency controlled by the Russian federal government, comes at a particularly apt moment for Russia's state media. To mark 150 years since the sale of Alaska, the media has published articles insinuating that Moscow should have kept "Russian America."

Warping Fleener's comments about Russia's hypothetical investments in Alaska fits this narrative nicely.

Meanwhile, bogus reports implying that he said Alaskans would be living better under Moscow have rocketed through the Russian media, and state propaganda outlets like Sputnik and RT have translated the story into multiple languages.

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