

SENATOR MURKOWSKI'S STATEMENT REGARDING FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDERS AWARENESS DAY

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, for the thirteenth consecutive year, communities across the world today are pausing during the ninth hour of the ninth day of the ninth month to acknowledge International Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Awareness Day. FASD Day will be observed in my home State of Alaska with ceremonies across the State.

I am grateful that this body is also recognizing Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Awareness Day with a moment of reflection. For this, I thank my colleagues, especially the senior Senator from South Dakota, Tim Johnson, who has joined with me in offering a resolution recognizing September 9, 2011 as National Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Awareness Day. I hope we will continue to pause in the ninth hour of the ninth day each September until fetal alcohol spectrum disorders are eradicated.

FASD is an umbrella term that describes a range of physical and mental birth defects that can occur in a fetus when a pregnant woman consumes alcohol. It is a leading cause of nonhereditary mental retardation in the United States. Many children affected by maternal drinking during pregnancy have irreversible conditions, including severe brain damage. It is causing permanent lifelong disability.

Unlike thousands of other diseases, FASD is 100 percent preventable. Prevention merely requires a woman to abstain from alcohol during pregnancy. Knowing that it is entirely preventable, it saddens me to think that every year in

this country an estimated 1 in every 100 babies is born with FASD. That is about 40,000 infants annually. FASD affects more children than Down's syndrome, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, and muscular dystrophy combined.

All in all, the direct and indirect economic costs of FASD in the United States are estimated to be \$5.4 billion. FASD is found in every community in America. It does not discriminate.

During my time in the Senate, I have given many speeches recognizing FASD day. In each of those speeches, I have talked about Alaska's high rate of FASD. A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention project established that in 2002, Alaska's FASD rate was the highest in the nation. Among our Native communities, the rate of FASD has been 15 times higher than in non-Native areas in our State. But this year I am proud to report that our statistics have vastly improved.

According to the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Alaska Native babies were born with fetal alcohol syndrome half as often around the year 2000 as they were five to seven years earlier.

Through a major federal-state prevention and education effort from 1991 to 1996, and with a second effort from 1998 to 2006, the rate of fetal alcohol syndrome among Alaska Native babies decreased by 49 percent. Alaska's overall rate dropped to 13.5 from 20.0.

More work can and should certainly be done, but this is a remarkable improvement for a state with historically the highest rate of FASD.

Mr. President, 40,000 American children each year are born with FASD. But education in prevention, treatment, and research of FASD will save countless future health care costs relating to this devastating, but entirely preventable, disorder.

I appreciate my colleagues' support of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Awareness Day and hope we all remember the innocent babies afflicted with this disorder. I hope we continue to recognize the ninth hour of the ninth day of each September until fetal alcohol syndrome disorders are eradicated.