

Sen. **Ted Stevens** was a towering figure.

So is his legacy.

Five thousand boxes, filled with his life's work and stored in the basement of the University of Alaska Fairbanks library, catalogue that legacy. Unpacked, the **papers** within those boxes could form a column six feet wide and six feet long — and taller than the Juneau Federal Building.

Unfortunately, Stevens' legacy now appears in jeopardy.

Earlier this month, historian, author and Alaska Dispatch News columnist Dermot Cole revealed that Stevens' family and the **Ted Stevens** Foundation are pulling the senator's records out of the university library. The records will be trucked to Anchorage, where they will be reviewed by archivists hired by the foundation. The foundation has said the **papers** will be available to the public some day. We don't know when that day will be and what will be missing when that day comes.

The tragedy in all this is that Stevens made his wishes known before he died. The Stevens Foundation is rejecting those wishes, and we fear its actions will end up censoring Stevens' **papers** for posterity. Future Alaskans will have lost a true record of a man who was a key figure in their state's history.

In 2009, Stevens signed an agreement with the library that said most of his **papers** would remain confidential until five years after his death. They were to be released this year. He intended to work with archivists to catalogue his voluminous records, but his sudden death in 2010 ended that plan before it started.

In the six years since Stevens signed the agreement, public and private donors have pledged millions of dollars to support the cataloguing of Stevens' **papers**. Oil company BP pledged \$1 million. The university gave \$435,000. In 2014, the state budget included \$1 million to the Stevens Foundation to process the **papers**.

Then-Gov. Sean Parnell said preserving Stevens' **papers** was a "worthy historical endeavor to ... ensure all Alaskans can access the senator's legacy work."

The Stevens Foundation says it is concerned that personal information might be revealed in the **papers**. That's already being addressed. The 2009 agreement states that personal files will be kept confidential for 50 years, and **UAF** has had no problems protecting the personal effects of other Alaskans including former Gov. Bill Egan, Sen. Bob Bartlett, Sen. Ernest Gruening and hundreds of other people.

The actions of the Stevens Foundation seem nothing more than attempt to censor the files and control the historical record. By taking the files from the university, a trusted neutral party, they will make Stevens' archive worth less. Historians will be unable to tell whether the files made available by the foundation are a true record or a culled, censored version.