

Murkowski favors restoring BIA funds

Rejecting the administration's Fiscal Year '88 budget proposal that would have cut programs affecting Alaska Natives, U.S. Sen. Frank Murkowski, R-Alaska, recently voted in favor of budget levels which would restore, and in some cases increase, funding for Alaska Native programs.

The budget proposal to Congress contained many recommendations for funding for programs which affect Alaska Native, Indian and Native Hawaiian people. Those proposals were referred to the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs, of which Murkowski is a member.

The committee voted out its own budget recommendation late last month which would restore funding levels that were either eliminated or reduced by the administration's proposal for the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Indian Health Service programs.

Murkowski called the recommendation "woefully inadequate" for programs that provide for the basic health, educational and social needs of Indians and Alaska Natives.

"Every year the Indian Affairs Committee is faced with proposals to cut funding for Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian people," Murkowski said. "If a fight is what it takes each year, that's what I'll continue to do to see that Alaska Natives receive their fair share of funding."

Murkowski said the committee rejected a BIA proposal for work programs which would have had the effect of "reducing Alaska's funding for employment assistance, vocational training and adult education for Alaska Natives."

He also said the committee voted for a \$6.9 million increase for the Johnson-O'Malley program in the BIA, which will bring this program's budget to \$29.6 million for FY '88, a \$7.6 million increase over what the program received in FY '87.

In the area of Hepatitis B, Murkowski said he was encouraged that the IHS budget recommendation includes funding to continue to vaccinate all newborns because it will help avoid early spread of the disease.