

Stevens was helpful in hearings: Aleuts

To the Editor:

This is in reference to your editorial of September 23, 1981, "Where were our leaders," which condemned Governor Hammond and the entire Alaska Congressional delegation for not appearing personally on September 15th at the Anchorage field hearing of the Federal Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians. While we recognize that you have written an apology, however limited it seemed, we would be remiss in not formally responding and publicly stating our concern of the unfair attacks on our congressional delegation.

The editorial unfairly implied that these leaders do not care about the suffering of the Aleuts during World War II, that other problems are more pressing in their minds, and that the civil rights of the people are less important to them than other issues.

We write to set the record straight, and we ask that this letter be published in the Tundra Times at the earliest opportunity.

In late 1978 a group of Aleut leaders briefed Senator Ted Stevens about the relocation and internment of Aleuts from the Pribilofs and from villages west of Umnak Island during World War II. Because so many years had passed since the war, the statute of limitations prevented a lawsuit in court. Only the Congress had the power to come to our assistance.

Senator Stevens agreed to sponsor appropriate legislation to investigate the Aleuts' suffering, and urged us to gather all the information we could find on the situation. When the time came, Senator Stevens had both the dedication and the opportunity, because of his seniority in the Senate, to be an effective champion of the Aleuts' interests. The Commit-

tee on Governmental Affairs had under consideration a bill to establish an investigative commission on the internment of Japanese Americans during the war. As a member of that committee, Senator Stevens offered an amendment—which was accepted—to require the proposed Commission to investigate the circumstances of the Aleuts' relocation and internment as well.

The public record merely shows the Stevens amendment was adopted by the committee and the full Senate. But much more behind-the-scenes effort was required. Our senior Senator worked successfully to obtain the support of Japanese-Americans, and Senator Daniel K. Inouye of Hawaii, for his Aleut amendment. Senator Stevens, through long hours of personal involvement and lobbying, was ultimately successful. When he formally offered our amendment, no Senator or interest group spoke against equal justice for the Aleut cause.

The Senate debated our bill on May 22, 1980. At that time Senator Inouye, who was floor manager of the legislation, made the following comment:

Mr. President, I wish to commend my colleague, Senator Ted Stevens, for amending our original bill to include an inquiry into the relocation and internment of the Alaskan Aleuts during (World War II). Unbeknownst to most of us, over 1,000 Native American citizens of the Aleutian Islands were summarily evacuated and retained in camps far worse than those that housed the Japanese-Americans.

And Senator Stevens responded in a formal statement to the Senate:

On behalf of myself and the Aleut-American community, I also wish to thank

Senators Inouye and Jackson for enthusiastically supporting an amendment of mine accepted in the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee. The amendment authorizes the Commission to also investigate the experiences of the Aleut people during World War II.

The momentum that Senator Stevens generated for the Aleut amendment carried over to the House of Representatives the following month.

On June 2, 1980, the House Judiciary Committee held the major hearings on legislation to investigate justices against the Japanese-Americans. That committee had before it the bill introduced by the majority leader, Congressman Jim Wright of Texas, and the Senate-passed bill which included the Aleut amendment.

Thanks to hard work by Senator Stevens and Congressman Don Young, Majority Leader Wright endorsed the Aleut amendment and asked his House colleagues to accept it. Senator Stevens, Congressman Young, and others, along with two representatives of the Aleut people, testified in support as well.

When President Carter signed Public Law 96-317 on July 31, 1980, establishing the independent Federal Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, Senator Ted Stevens and Congressman Don Young were at his side. This was a proud moment for all the Aleut people, but most of all, it reflected the dedication of these Alaska representatives to a full measure of justice for their Constituents — the Aleut people.

Senator Frank Murkowski — who joined the Senate after approval of the legislation — has been supportive this year of our efforts to secure full federal funding of the Commission's activities, and we

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have been grateful for his support.

Governor Jay Hammond has been an important ally, and his contribution to justice for the Aleuts interned in World War II must not be ignored. The Governor signed into law this year legislation which provided adequate funding for a complete evidentiary presentation by the Aleut representatives in testimony before the Commission in Anchorage, Unalaska and St. Paul. Without the Governor's support, the record of the Aleuts' tragedy in World War II could never have been complete.

In conclusion, it must be recognized by all members of the Native community in Alas-

ka that Senator Stevens provided more than constituent service when he sponsored the Aleut amendment in this important legislation. Senator Stevens provided determined and effective leadership. Without his efforts in the Senate there would have been no hearing in Anchorage — and the world would never have known about the injustices suffered by our people in the remote camps of Southeastern Alaska during World War II.

Very truly yours,
Philemon Michael Tutiakoff
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Aleutian/Pribilof Islands
Association
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