

Murkowski seeks fall passage of 1991 bill

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Sen. Frank Murkowski, R-Alaska, expressed hope last week that an Alaska Federation of Natives' package of amendments to the Alaska Native

Claims Settlement Act could pass this fall.

A version of the amendments, sponsored by Rep. Don Young and aimed at allowing an extension to restrictions on the sale of stock in Native corporations beyond 1991, passed the House

late last month without dissent.

"We're going under the presumption we can get the necessary agreements," Murkowski said in a telephone interview following a Senate subcommittee hearing on the 1991 bill. "I think we had a real good hearing."

The senator said, however, he is concerned about a detailed list of concerns the Department of Interior has about the bill.

Interior Assistant Secretary Bill Horn said the department has not yet taken a stand for or against the bill, but he called for "substantial" amendments to it at the hearing last week.

Janie Leask, AFN president, said in her testimony before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee that the bill is needed as soon as possible because Alaska Natives are concerned that Native control of ANCSA corporations that hold legal title to Native land may be lost after 1991.

Horn said Interior supports the goal of continued Native control of Alaska Native lands, but added "we believe the bill goes far beyond what is

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necessary to achieve that result."

"Not only do we disagree with automatically extending the restraints against alienation as to all Native corporation stock, but the bill makes many other changes to ANSCA unrelated to the 1991 deadline.

"We oppose making such wholesale revisions in the structure of the original act, lest we undo the progress which has occurred under this settlement to date," Horn said.

Specifically, Horn said the provisions in the bill for the transfer of assets from corporations to tribal entities, the restrictions against sale to and inheritance of stock by non-Natives, and the mandated continuation of restrictions against the free alienability of stock all will have adverse consequences on ANCSA's structure.

Following the hearing, Interior Secretary Donald Hodel issued a statement on the 1991 amendments, saying Interior "supports efforts to clarify

the position of Alaska Native corporations after 1991."

Hodel pledged to continue working with the Alaska congressional delegation, AFN and others who feel strongly the legislation must be passed.

"We identified some technical and policy changes we feel are needed. As stated at the hearing, we have not yet reached a final position on the legislation," Hodel said.

Murkowski issued a press release after the hearing, stating that he would like the Senate to act on the 1991 amendments this year.

"Additional problems were brought up at today's hearing and in previous hearings that have yet to be completely addressed," he said.

"With only six weeks left in this session, it would be quite easy for us to shove this legislation on the back burner and forget about it for awhile. I don't think anybody wants to see this happen."

The senator, however, listed his own concerns about the bill, including possible creation of sovereign entities.

"The 1991 amendments will not foster sovereignty, nor will they

detract from any self-government powers which Alaska Natives may now possess under existing law," he said. "The bill will not tip the scales on these issues in either direction."

And he said if it is gain passage in the Senate, it also must not provide a tax exemption for developed, revenue producing land, nor could the federal and state government provide any additional land or money to Native corporations for those born after 1971.

The hearing record is to remain open until Aug. 18 to allow time for written testimony to be submitted from any other interested parties.

Those testifying Aug. 4 included Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska; Horn; John Katz, special counsel to Gov. Bill Sheffield; Emil Notti, Department of Community and Regional Affairs commissioner; Leask; William Williams, president of the Tanana Chiefs Corp.; Chris McNeil, general counsel of Sealaska; Elizabeth Johnston, counsel for Bristol Bay Native Corp.; Roy Huhndorf, Cook Inlet Region Inc. president; and Cheri Jacobus of the National Rifle Association.