

Senator responds to GOP candidates' call for bill's delay

A letter signed by seven Republican gubernatorial candidates calling for a delay in passage of Alaska Federation of Natives-backed amendments to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act has drawn the ire of Sen. Frank Murkowski, R-Alaska, as well as further statements from three of the signers.

In a prepared press release, Murkowski responded directly to a charge made in the letter that Alaskans have not been granted an adequate time to study and comment on the legislation.

"More hearings and workshops have been held on their legislative proposal than on any other Alaska-related issue to come before Congress in the past few years," he said. "Among us, Sen. Stevens, Congressman Young and I have taken testimony regarding the 1991 amendment on 11 occasions."

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Senator responds to GOP candidates

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Murkowski also addressed a concern expressed in the letter that the amendment passed by the House and awaiting action in the Senate might foster the concept of Native sovereignty.

"The amendments as written do not allow establishment of sovereign nations within Alaska," he said.

Murkowski called the amendments, aimed at allowing restrictions on the sale of Native corporation stock to remain in place beyond 1991, "important legislation."

Three of the gubernatorial candidates who signed the letter issued statements after it was sent to Sen. Malcolm Wallop, including Bob Richards, Walter Hickel and Arliss Sturgulewski.

Richards said in a letter to Murkowski that his call for a delay has caused some confusion and was issued only because of "apparent ambiguity" in the House bill regarding sovereignty.

He said Young's substitute amendment raises further ambiguities regarding sovereignty, but added he is confident Murkowski can avoid that problem.

"Beyond this concern, I wholeheartedly favor the 1991 amendments and urge their passage," he said.

In a letter to Wallop, Hickel said he is in "total agreement with the Native leadership that the 1991 issues are of critical importance to the future of Alaska," but that he has further concerns about the proposed legislation that have not yet been addressed.

Hickel said specifically that a disclaimer in the bill concerning sovereignty should "clearly state that

this legislation does not intend to confer power of self government outside the jurisdiction of the State of Alaska."

And he also said he has concerns regarding sections in the legislation proposing to allow the transfer of assets to a federal entity.

Hickel said immunities for undeveloped land should be provided under state law and administered under state jurisdiction, but that he does support protection for undeveloped land.

In a letter to the *Tundra Times*, Sturgulewski said her concern about the legislation is over land taxation.

"The need to protect undeveloped land from confiscatory taxation is critical. However, it does not seem wise to write language into federal law granting tax-exempt status to Native land in perpetuity," she said.

"I am strongly of the opinion that appropriate tax exemptions should be handled at the state level and that Native and non-Native lands should be treated alike."

Sturgulewski pointed out the state's revenue situation has changed greatly and that any action that could affect the state's financial rating by affecting the extent of assessable property must be thoroughly evaluated.

"In addition, I am concerned about the potential for conflicts in cities and boroughs if only Native lands are exempted under federal law," she said.

Sturgulewski also took issue with a recent editorial in the *Tundra Times* stating that gubernatorial candidates who signed the letter seeking a delay were taking an "anti-Native stand."

"In my view, your editorial characterization of my action as 'anti-Native' is unfortunate and (speaking for myself) is inaccurate."