

House passes 1991 bill without dissent

by A.J. McClanahan

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The House of Representatives last week approved by voice vote a package of amendments to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act that would allow an extension to restrictions on the sale of stock in Native corporations.

"We have cleared a major hurdle with the 1991 amendments being unanimously passed out of the House," said Alaska Federation of Natives President Janie Leask. "We are very optimistic that the legislation will be approved this year."

Under the current terms of the 1971 act, shares in Alaska Native corporations become fully alienable in 1991. A group of Native leaders representing Alaska Native village and regional corporations, nonprofit organizations and other Native interests has been

working to amend the act to give shareholders more options to protect their corporations, assets and lands.

Members of that group, the 1991 Steering Committee, said they wished to compliment U.S. Rep. Don

Young, R-Alaska, for sponsoring the legislation in the house.

"The language incorporated in the bill incorporated most of the concerns raised during the last four years," said Spud Williams of Fairbanks, president

of the Tanana Chiefs Conference.

Williams and other Native spokesmen said they hope for passage of the bill by the Senate this fall.

Young said changes were made to

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the bill before it was passed in the House to ensure that it deals solely with stock and land ownership.

"These amendments are intended to respond to the concerns of rural Alaska and to maintain the intent of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act; nothing more, nothing less," he said.

"It is my belief that we must act to provide flexibility for the villages in rural Alaska to make sure that the land conveyed under ANCSA is not lost over time. My goal is to protect the land, which is the most important part of ANCSA," he said.

The House bill provides for the continuation of restrictions contained in ANCSA, unless an individual Native corporation takes action to eliminate or modify the sale restrictions.

Dissenter's rights are provided where the corporation elects to continue stock restrictions. In addition to clarification of corporate share ownership rights, the bill provides for land ownership protections.

The bill also is aimed at helping solve the problem of stock ownership

for Natives born after 1971, who were accorded no stock under the original act. It would allow regional corporations to issue Native common stock to those Natives.

Special provisions are included for Bristol Bay Native Corp., Aleut Corp. and Cook Inlet Region Inc., all of which could decide to retain the 1991 expiration date with an option to continue the stock-sale prohibition by a vote of stockholders.

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee has scheduled a final hearing on the bill for today.

Natives have been working for several years to develop amendments to ANCSA because they fear loss of their land and control of their corporations to non-Natives after 1991.

The amendments were the major focus of the AFN convention last fall and a special convention in March 1985. In addition, numerous hearings have been held throughout the state and in Washington, D.C., over the last two years.

Eleven hearings or workshops have been held on the proposed legislation

since August 1985 by the Alaska congressional delegation, including four hearings in both Anchorage and Washington, D.C.; as well as meetings in Hoonah, Ketchikan, Sitka, Juneau, Fairbanks, Bethel, Barrow.