

Binkley opposes proposed IHS regulations

State Rep. John Binkley has submitted written testimony to the Indian Health Service opposing proposed regulation changes which he says would significantly affect the delivery of health care to Alaska Natives.

Under the new eligibility regulations, the IHS would issue beneficiary cards which entitle an Alaska Native to receive health care services within the IHS unit of residence.

The card would be issued only after evidence is provided that the person is of at least one-fourth Native ancestry and is a member of a federally designated tribe or an Alaska Native.

Binkley, a Republican running for the State Senate, says the new changes infringe upon local tribes' rights to determine their membership.

"It's been recognized in the Federal Constitution, treaties, case law and legislation that American Indians and Alaska Natives belong to sovereign tribes," Binkley wrote in his letter to the IHS.

"The communities of Alaska take the responsibility for recognizing their members for various enrollment purposes very seriously," he said. "For the federal government to now change the process with the result of taking that right and responsibility away from communities is wrong."

Binkley also said there would be a very impractical side to the federal government undertaking an enrollment effort.

Noting that the regulations suggest a federal effort would save money, Binkley said the government appears to have forgotten a lesson learned by implementation of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

"We learned that enrollment is a massive, complex task, which is very costly and difficult to accomplish as well as unsettling to the people," he said.

Binkley said he believes Alaska Native tribes are the ultimate authority for determining their members.

The representative from Bethel also raised concerns over a regulation change which would require an enrolled person to obtain health care only within his or her assigned service area.

"While services provided by area may be realistic in some locations in the Lower 48, this regulation would create a hardship on anyone from Alaska who may be absent from the state," he said.

Binkley said there is a legitimate concern that such an action would have the effect of eliminating medical care

to individuals who may be properly entitled to it but who may be physically absent from an assigned area.

"The federal government holds a trust responsibility to Alaska Natives, and that includes medical services," Binkley said.

Oil, gas policy

Arliss Sturgulewski, Republican candidate for governor, recently outlined a three-pronged oil and gas policy aimed at keeping oil and gas producers in Alaska, expanding opportunities for oil and gas development and expanding markets for Alaska oil and gas production while preserving environmental values.

"The oil and gas industry is the single largest segment of Alaska's economy and will remain so for decades to come," she said.

"As we focus on strengthening other elements of our economy, we must not lose sight of the continuing importance of petroleum in our overall plan for Alaska's future."

Noting that oil companies must make plans many years in advance, Sturgulewski said, "Alaska's leaders must take action now to ensure that the people who make decisions in oil company boardrooms continue to view our state as a good investment."

Alaska's leaders must prepare for the day when oil prices return to higher levels by encouraging oil companies to resume aggressive exploration in Alaska, Sturgulewski said.

"As governor, I will do that by adopting a stable and predictable tax policy, by streamlining permitting procedures, by making sure that regulations are reasonable and consistent and by promoting discovery royalties and exploration incentives," she said.

Also, Sturgulewski restated her commitment to fighting in Congress to open the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas exploration and to establishing a five-year lease sale schedule in cooperation with industry and the federal government.

Vote criticized

Pegge Begich sharply criticized Congressman Don Young recently for voting "no" on the Superfund reauthorization legislation passed by a wide margin in the House earlier this month.

Begich is the Democratic candidate for Alaska's only seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. The Super-

fund is a federal fund for the clean-up of toxic and hazardous waste sites.

"Don Young can't return to Alaska and tell us that he is representing us if he is willing to vote against H.R. 2005. Alaska needs the Superfund," Begich said.

The Superfund bill has broad bipartisan support, Begich said. "It passed 386 to 27 in the House and 88-8 in the Senate. These votes show a strong national interest in ensuring a safe environment," she added.

Begich said Alaska needs the bill and that she would lead a move in the next Congress so that Alaskan sites can be cleaned up.

Among problems within the state she pointed to that need Superfund assistance were groundwater contamination in Peters Creek, benzene contamination in Anchor Point and mercury contamination in Anchorage's Ship Creek.

Olds seeks 'work fare'

Glenn Olds, Alaska's Democratic candidate for U.S. Senate, recently called for creation of a national service corps, matched by conversion of welfare to "workfare," to break the expensive and destructive cycle of unemployment and unemployability among Americans, especially the young.

The goal of the proposed program, Olds said, is to "match human resources and national need."

Olds cited precedents to his program in the Civilian Conservation Corps, Peace Corps and VISTA — Volunteers in Service to America.

"Such constructive work is cheaper in dollars and human benefit than unemployment insurance, crime, drugs and suicide," he said. "With high unemployment, highest among our youngest, and deferred maintenance of nearly every local, state or national agency at record high, the match of human resources and national need can be made, now!"

Cowper calls for sanctions

Democratic gubernatorial nominee Steve Cowper recently proposed swift action on two high seas salmon intercept problems that apparently have cost Western Alaska fishermen millions of dollars.

Cowper reiterated his call for the federal government to impose sanctions against Taiwan in response to the alleged illegal laundering of salmon through a U.S. port. He also called for

an immediate investigation to determine whether the Japanese high seas salmon fleet is accurately reporting its catch of North American king salmon.

"This illegal harvest of Alaskan salmon is intolerable," Cowper said. "Fishermen in Western Alaska are facing reduced catches at the exact time countries that claim to be our allies and trading partners are taking millions of dollars worth of Alaska salmon."

The problems point up the need to work harder to end the high seas intercept fishery, which hurts not only Western Alaska fishermen, but commercial fishermen in Southeast and sports fishermen throughout Alaska, Cowper said.

He said if an on-going federal investigation confirms the Taiwan salmon laundering scheme, the United States should seize the catch as contraband and use its proceeds to compensate fishermen who were injured by the illegal catch. In addition, Cowper said the United States should impose stiff fines to help offset the cost of prosecution and institute forfeiture proceedings against any vessel involved in the illegal activities.

On the alleged mislabeling by some Japanese fishermen, Cowper said the federal government should undertake an investigation to determine if the fishermen are catching North American chinooks and purposely labeling them as lower-valued pink and chum salmon. If the allegations prove true, Cowper said the United States should reconsider its participation in the International North-Pacific Fisheries Commission which regulates the Japanese catch.

Murkowski gets award

U.S. Sen. Frank Murkowski, R-Alaska, recently was presented with the Golden Bulldog Award for his efforts to cut federal spending, eliminate waste and reduce the federal deficit.

Murkowski was presented the award by the Watchdogs of the Treasury Inc., a non-partisan organization, during an afternoon ceremony in the U.S. Capitol.

It was Murkowski's fourth Bulldog Award since he took office in 1981.

The award is presented annually to members of Congress who vote to contain spending the group deems unnecessary at least 75 percent of the time, based on a compilation of votes on economic and fiscal issues.