

The truth thwarts fight to end seal harvest

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A war of the simple truth coupled with Reagan administration and conservation group opposition is credited with defeating a proposed amendment to the North Pacific seal hunt treaty which would have radically cut back the annual Pribilof seal harvest.

Aleut Corp. president Larry Merculief said an apparent win for foes of the current seal harvest was averted when senators on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee were shown the simple truth about the effect of the proposed ban on the seal population, the residents of the Pribilofs and on the seal popu-

lation.

Merculief added the highly respected Audubon and Sierra clubs supported the existing treaty.

The amendment, proposed by a democrat and supported by the Friends of the Animals group, was defeated in the Foreign Relations Committee by a 9 to 6 vote. All Republicans on the committee and Democrat John Glenn of Ohio, voted to kill the amendment. The committee then unanimously voted to recommend the entire treaty be approved by the Senate.

Merculief travelled to Washington last week to personally lead a fight against the treaty by "pounding on every door and presenting the facts.

"Once they were given the facts, people came around to our point of view."

Those facts included a four-point letter which included scientific studies show that seals on the St. George Islands have been declining since a moratorium on hunting on those islands was passed. That study indicates that female seals are unable to pick up the growth rate once the hunting is stopped and it is believed the same would happen in St. Paul Island if a ban was enforced there.

Merculief also provided a legal opinion drawn up by the International Treaty Department of the American Bar Association which gave the opinion that if the United States amended the

treaty, it would entirely negate the document and seal hunting on the high seas, which is now banned by the treaty, could begin again. Japan is the primary high seas hunter of seals because the Japanese believe the seal population is cutting into Japanese fishing, Merculief said.

He also presented economic arguments that the 73 percent cutback would have disastrous effects on the Pribilof economy. Thirty percent of the population on the Pribilofs are already on the poverty income bracket and a further reduction of the islands only industry would, in essence, eliminate all resources and related services such as ferry and power to the islands.

Merculief said his arguments

also directly attacked misleading national advertising campaigns by conservation groups which "grossly misled" the public and senators into believing that the residents of the Pribilofs are "rich and the federal government didn't have to supply any subsidy."

Financial data gathered for the campaign included the statements that the federal government pours \$2.1 million into low income housing on the island annually when the \$2.1 million subsidy was a one-shot grant; and that federal support to the people of the Pribilofs included the funding to maintain a weather station and navigation station.

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Merculief said that once the members of the committee heard the facts, they changed their vote. He added that Reagan administration support for the existing treaty helped greatly.

Merculief added that there is always a chance that foes of the treaty may regroup and get a supporter to introduce an amendment when the treaty reaches the Senate floor but he said the 15-0 vote to endorse the treaty as it stands should help counter that possible move.

The treaty is considered every four years and effects the United States, Canada, Japan and the USSR, Russia.

Some 600 Aleuts would have been effected if the treaty had been passed.