

Compensation bill for Aleuts delayed 1 week

by Steve Pilkington

for the Tundra Times

The Aleutian and Pribilof Islands Restitution Act, a bill aimed at compensating Alaska Natives for their internment in camps during World War II, was scheduled to go before Congress last week, but instead was delayed because a quorum could not be reached.

The bill has now been scheduled to appear before Congress at the end of this week.

In spite of the delay, Alaska Native officials supporting the act say they are optimistic.

"I have every feeling that the bill will pass this year," said Agafon Krukoff, president of The Aleut Corp.

The final draft language has been approved, he said.

If passed, the bill would compensate not only surviving Alaska Natives interned or born in the camps, but would also compensate the communities affected by the war.

During the war, Aleuts living on Aleutian Islands were taken from their homes and interned in camps in Southeastern Alaska. Many of them died during their internment, as a result of the conditions in the camps.

When some of the Aleuts were returned to their homes at the end of the war, they found that their villages had been looted by the American soldiers who used them, including their homes and churches.

Compensation provided by the bill would be in four separate categories:

- Every eligible Aleut would receive \$12,000.

- There would be a \$5 million fund created for the benefit of the six Aleut communities affected during the war.

- A \$1.4 million fund would be provided to compensate affected Aleut villages for church property lost, damaged or destroyed during the war.

- \$15 million would be paid to The Aleut Corp. in lieu of regaining Attu Island, which is now in the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge system.

Regardless of the delay, Krukoff

• Aleut bill receives support

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said the bill has wide support.

"We have 75 senators supporting it," he said last week, and he indicated that some senators are pushing to have the bill ready before the August recess.

As a result, by the time members of Congress return, the bill will be ready for final votes by the Senate, he said.

"There is nobody objecting to the bill at this time that we know of," he said.

But even if compensation is provided for Alaska Natives affected by the war, most feel that it still is not enough.

"I think we lost a lot by settling for

\$12,000," Krukoff said, "but it's hard to expect more than that."

There are about 400 surviving Aleuts to be compensated, which is less than 50 percent of the 880 originally placed in the camps, he said.

"Five million goes to the six affected villages, and some money might go to the elderly, the needy or community centers," he said. "That's not a lot of dollars if you split it between six villages."

Krukoff believes that some members of Congress want to have the bill passed before the Bicentennial Celebration on Sept. 17.

"That way," he said, "we could look back at the Constitution and say, 'It works.'"