

It's time for an Aleut bill

We're gratified to see that the Aleutian and Pribilof Island Restitution Act is wending its way through Congress and that congressional leaders appear to be optimistic about its passage this year.

This bill is long overdue. The Aleut people suffered tremendously during World War II when they were forced by the federal government to leave their homes. They were put in camps in Southeastern Alaska where many of them became ill and died.

This is a shocking side of World War II history in Alaska, but what is even more shocking is that U.S. soldiers looted and destroyed many of the Aleuts' homes, and in some cases removed or destroyed priceless icons, other artifacts and household items.

Ostensibly, the Aleuts were removed from the Aleutian Islands for their own protection. The Japanese were threatening several of the islands, so military officials decided that the people had to be moved to keep them safe and out of the field of combat.

Unfortunately, hindsight shows that the moving of the people was ill planned. For example, many of them were given only 24 hours or less to pack up their belongings and move to a foreign place for an indeterminate amount of time.

And the places where the people stayed in Southeastern Alaska were hardly fit for a few people — let alone entire communities.

When the people were returned to the Aleutian Islands, the federal government decided to retain possession of Attu Island, and the residents there have never been compensated for the loss of their home.

Paying each individual Aleut \$12,000 — more than 40 years after the fact — is small compensation indeed. Certainly, the money itself cannot make up for the wrongs that were done.

Also, it must be remembered that this compensation would go only to living Aleuts and six Aleutian villages. No compensation is planned for the heirs of those who died in Southeast.

On the other hand, the attempt to make some sort of restitution is the only way the federal government can show that it is making a good-faith effort for the people.

We applaud the comment about this bill by Agafon Krukoff, president of The Aleut Corp., who said that getting the bill passed before the Bicentennial Celebration would show that the U.S. Constitution is indeed a living document meant for *all* Americans.