

# Tom Richards, Jr.'s Column--

## *Author Points Out Importance of Scholar-Intern Fund*

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THOMAS RICHARDS, JR.

OLONGAPO CITY — The formation of the Nick Begich Scholarship-Intern Fund is a welcome development. Congressman Begich often expressed concern over the lack of money for bringing young Alaskans to Washington to learn about the

workings of federal government.

In July of 1971, while on a tour of duty with the Navy in Washington, Nick offered me the opportunity to serve a congressional internship in his office. It was at that time that I became aware of the internship program and the need for expanding it to allow more Alaskans to benefit from the

experience of working within the federal government.

Factors which cannot be stressed enough are the importance of federal programs to Alaska and the need for Alaskans to understand how the Congress and major agencies of the federal government decide the magnitude and direction of these programs.

Much of the time, Alaskans are not aware of federal attention to our state until programs are implemented and rigidly firmed. We usually experience the effects without deciding the objectives of federal programs, such as social, environmental, and economic development projects.

The Alaska Congressional delegation in Washington, being the smallest of any delegation from any state, is hard pressed to monitor federal projects for Alaska and is occupied with so many tasks that our influence in decision making for many areas is negligible.

The solution which I envision for improving the relationship between Alaska and the federal government is to maximize the Alaskan presence in the capital. The Nick Begich Fund has great potential for contributing toward that end.

At present, internships for Alaskans in Washington are hardly worth mentioning. The ones which receive the most publicity, internships offered by members of our congressional delegation, are usually limited to the summer months and lack the duration and comprehensive planning to make them anything more than glorified field trips for Alaskan high school and college students.

What is needed is money to develop worthwhile internships which would allow young Alaskans to live, work, and study in Washington over extended periods of time. The Begich Fund could create career and educational opportunities for deserving Alaskans in Washington, and allow interns to return home with a valuable knowledge.

Alaskan residents compete with the rest of the nation in determining our own future. Armed with a greater understanding of the federal process, afforded in such a project as the Nick Begich Fund, Alaskans would stand a better chance of controlling our own affairs.

According to the announcement of the creation of the Begich Fund, it will work to "encourage and assist Alaskan students of political science to obtain an education and work in Washington."

This is a fine place to start, but I hope that the program can be expanded in the future to allow many other Alaskans who are directly affected by federal projects to spend time in the capital and achieve a greater understanding of the workings of government.

The first need, however, is for money. It is fitting that a fund which would bring to life one of Nick Begich's goals is named in his honor.

Alaskans, and friends of Alaska, who can appreciate the wisdom of the internship program, may wish to send donations to the Nick Begich Scholarship-Intern Fund, in care of the Congressional Office, Federal Building, Anchorage, Alaska 99501 or the Congressional Office, 1210 Longworth Building, Washington, D. C. 20515.