

Inouye to hold hearing in Anchorage

by Steve Pilkington
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U.S. Sen. Daniel Inouye, D-Hawaii, is scheduled to hold a hearing in Anchorage Saturday, giving Alaska Natives a chance to vent their concerns about rural health, funding and tribal issues.

Inouye, who chairs the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs, is expected to discuss a bill he introduced which would streamline the process of

extending federal tribal recognition to Indian and Alaska Native groups.

Under the current process some Lower 48 Indian groups seeking federal tribal recognition have been backlogged for years, costing the groups thousands of dollars, according to Bureau of Indian Affairs officials.

Indian News, published by the BIA, reported this month that Hazel Elbert, acting deputy to the assistant for Indian affairs, opposes Inouye's bill.

"We strongly oppose the enactment of S. 611, because it is unnecessary, it weakens the criteria used in acknowledging groups as tribes," Elbert said in a May 5 hearing on the bill.

Alaska Native testimony supporting or opposing Inouye's bill is expected at the Anchorage hearing.

Even though the hearing is set for Memorial Day weekend, Alaska Federation of Natives Vice President Julie Kitka said last week that AFN expects a good turnout.

AFN is arranging the Hawaii Democrat's trip. The hearing will be held in the Federal Building in Anchorage.

Kitka said that although the major issues scheduled for Inouye's hearing are rural health and tribal issues, any Native issue can be included in the agenda.

AFN has asked several village presidents to sign up to give testimony at the hearing, Kitka said, and anyone else who is interested should contact the Anchorage-based group.