

# Stevens explains, defends sovereignty stand

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Indian Reorganization Act status for Native-owned land may be a solution to the problem of loss of Native land but U.S. Sen. Ted Stevens warned that that solution may bring more problems than anticipated.

Stevens and the two other members of the Alaska Congressional delegation spoke to the annual meeting of the Alaska Federation of Natives last week but only Stevens delved into an area which has brought him criticism from many tribal leaders — his stand on Native sovereignty.

Stevens consistently has told Native leaders that they must deal with the state when it comes to sovereignty. That position brought a rebuke from the United Tribes of Alaska which earlier in the week vowed to boycott fund-raising efforts on Stevens' behalf.

Stevens, who has always had a close working relationship with AFN and on behalf of Alaska Natives in the past, expanded on his sovereignty stand when he addressed the standing-room-only convention hall last week.

His concern about sovereignty, he said was the result that a government-to-government relationship could bring in terms of financial support.

Stevens said "Many of the Native tribes do possess the attributes of sovereignty today," but he said that he was talking of "tribes" and not necessarily "Native villages."

Alaska villages generally receive financial support from the federal government while, in Alaska, tribes do not.

Stevens said he believes that the state must be involved in the discussion because of that difference of support.

If the federal government decides that all villages possess sovereign tribal status and decides to fund programs on a government-to-government status, the state is not obligated to provide assistance to

those sovereign villages.

"If the federal budget declines in the future as it undoubtedly will, these villages will be shut off from state programs in the state that is the wealthiest in the nation."

Stevens said "I know my position is not popular with those who advocate sovereignty but I

firmly believe it is in the best interest . . . your interest . . . to associate the state in how and to what extent the villages will receive sovereignty in this state."

Stevens also recounted the legislative success of the past year and spoke of the common theme of the convention —

unity of purpose. "We have no alternative but to work together," he said. "My grandmother told me when I was growing up, 'Teddy, you can fight as much as you want with your brothers and sisters at home but when you walk down the street you walk together.'"

"Your problems are my problems."

Sen. Frank Murkowski told the delegates to unify on the 1991 issue and he and Rep. Don Young, along with Stevens, pledged to fight for any proposed 1991 legislative changes desired by the people.