

Tundra Times



Inupiat People's Heritage
Uk Kuli Neek Inupiat and Reporting

Den Nena Hienash Our Land Speak
Ungang Tashkang the Alutians Speak

Yupik Kaniat in the Way Yupik's Talk

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Editorial

It's been years. But, finally, the 1991 legislation has passed Congress. Although we won't be able to truly celebrate until after action by President Reagan, we can say that the overwhelming support for this important piece of legislation makes its final adoption much more likely.

Our hats are off to many people who made this legislation possible — those within the Native community, Alaska's congressional delegation, their staffs and many others. Particular praise should go to Congressman Don Young who went head to head with the U.S. Department of Interior and scored a major victory.

There has been much division within the Native community about this controversial issue. Many Alaska Natives have sharply criticized it, and these criticisms have led to serious divisions.

We can only say that while the bill is not perfect, it is certainly one of the most significant developments in Congress since passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

Unfortunately, ANCSA is fatally flawed. And the reason it is flawed is that it does not follow the Native community's thinking. We are not criticizing those who passed ANCSA. We are pointing out that the 20-year "time bomb" in the act, which allows individual Natives to sell their shares of Native corporation stock in 1991, is not the Native way of doing things.

The beauty of the Alaska Native community is that for all the problems and disagreements among Alaska Natives, one guiding principle always remains at the core. That is that the good of the group is put above the particular needs and desires of the individual.

This is the fundamental difference between Western culture and Alaska Natives.

The framers of ANCSA had to accept the 20-year time bomb in the crush of getting what was basically a very important bill passed in 1971. But that doesn't mean that it has to remain there.

We will agree that this 1991 bill is not the perfect answer. That's impossible. But we will say it is a remarkable feat to have come this close to accomplishing what amounts to the defusing of the time bomb well before 1991.

The key problem with final approval of this bill rests with the Department of Interior, which continues to take a hardline approach on individual rights. It would be truly unfortunate if the department were to be successful in convincing President Reagan to oppose the bill.

We can only hope, however, that even if this occurs that Alaska's dedicated and seemingly tireless congressional delegation will prevail in overriding a veto.



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