

Letters to the Editor

Bill to guarantee religious freedom

Dear Editor:

The Native American Free Exercise of Religion Act of 1993 (NAFERA), has been introduced by Senator Daniel Inouye (D-Hawaii) as S1021. The key provisions of this bill seek to guarantee to Native Americans, including Alaskan Native, the same basic religious freedoms afforded to others in this nation in the practice of their religion.

There are four basic components of NAFERA, including the freedom of the Native American Church (NAC) to practice the sacramental use of peyote in religious ceremonies; protection of designated sacred religious sites from desecration; recognition of Native American prisoner's access to religious ceremonies and customers; and the provision for easier access to certain animal parts — particularly feathers and wings of eagles — used in religious ceremonies.

Recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions (*Lyng v. Northwest Indian Cemetery Association* and *Employment Division v. Smith*) have departed from the traditional constitutional tests for cases involving claims of violation of the free exercise of religion. It is my understanding that, according to that test, once a claim of the violation of free exercise was established, the Court traditionally saw the burden falling on the state to prove that (1) it had a compelling interest in the action taken by it and (2) it had used the means that at least intrusive to that

religion's practice to accomplish that compelling interest. Eliminating such a test, the Court has placed in jeopardy the religious liberties of Natives as well as the rest of us. This legislation seeks to guarantee such basic constitutional right to Natives by lifting up their foremost religious concerns. It also opens the door to the very same legal remedies to Native people as are presently available to other religious groups in the United States. If you would like more information, contact me at the church office (563-3341). If you would like to let the members of the Alaska Congressional delegation know your views, write or call:

Congressman Don Young: 233 Rayburn Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20510 (202) 225-5765

Senator Ted Stevens: 522 Hart Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20510 (202) 224-3004

Senator Frank Murkowski, 09 Hart Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20510 (202) 224-6665

Sincerely,
Bob Nelson
Assistant Rector
St. Mary's
Episcopal Church

Metlakatla Indians thank Inouye

July 14, 1993

The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye
U.S. Senate
722 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Daniel K. Inouye:

The purpose of this letter is to support the efforts that have been presented by the Alaska Sanitation Task Force and the Village Participation Conference 1993 concerning the water and sewer needs of rural Alaska.

We attended the Village Participation Conference 1993 and heard directly from Alaska Native Villagers describing conditions of human suffering as they talked about their water and sewer needs.

The Metlakatla Indian Community agrees that there is a dire need to address the water and sewer of rural Alaska. Specifically, in Metlakatla Indian Community one-half of the housing stock is tied into an older water and sewer system. We are seeking out every avenue to resolve our water and sewer problems.

We hope that these resolutions and recommendations will receive favorable consideration. On a personal note, special thanks for having a Congressional hearing on the water and sewer concerns of Alaska.

Sincerely,
METLAKATLA INDIAN
COMMUNITY
Casey D. Nelson, Sr., Mayor