

Trust fund of \$5 million

# Bill would create fund for Aleuts

by **Steve Pilkington**  
for the Tundra Times

A bill currently before Congress would establish a trust fund of \$5 million for the benefit of Aleut communities in Alaska.

The Aleutian and Pribilof Islands Restitution Act, sponsored by Congressman Don Young, is aimed at compensating losses suffered by Alaska Natives during World War II.

"In total we lost about 20 percent of our population," said Alice

Petrivelli, chairman of the board of the Aleut Corp.

Petrivelli, who was 12 when her family and village were moved to Killisnoo, an area in Southeastern Alaska near Angoon, remembers the cold and hunger her people suffered there.

"When we got there it was beautiful, but the winter was very bad," she said.

In 1980 the Commission on War-time Relocation and Internment of Civilians was established to review U.S. military directives requiring

relocation and sometimes detention of civilians during World War II.

The commission's findings were that: "The United States failed to provide reasonable care for the Aleuts, resulting in widespread illness, disease and death among the residents of the camps."

Flore Lekanof, who is originally from St. George Island, recalled what it was like when the Aleuts were taken to Southeast Alaska.

"We found ourselves dropped off

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by the ship in Funter Bay in the worst kind of conditions you can think of," he said. "I lost a sister. She was taken to Juneau with pneumonia where she died."

About 26 people from St. George Island died as a result of harsh conditions, Lekanof said.

"The people had to provide for themselves," he said. "We were living in unfinished buildings — old cannery buildings, I think, which were not fit to be lived in."

The people from St. George Island were later moved to an old mine site on the opposite side of Funter Bay to separate them from people from St. Paul Island.

The commission's study also found that the federal government failed to protect valuable Aleut property, lost after the Native people were taken from their homes.

The study found that, "Personal and community property, including community church property, was looted, vandalized and destroyed by U.S. forces."

The study also examined losses sustained by the residents of Attu Island, who were taken to Japan as prisoners of war.

If passed, the bill would compensate each eligible Aleut for personal loss

of property with a \$12,000 award from the trust fund. Natives who were relocated, however, say there is no way to replace the icons that were priceless to the people.

Eligibility for compensation applies to any Aleut who was a resident of Attu Island on June 7, 1942, or any Aleut relocated from the Pribilof or Aleutian islands to another area.

Compensation would also be available for any Aleut born while his or her mother was subject to relocation during the war.

"There is no excuse for the U.S. government to have put the people where they put them," Lekanof said. "Those were the worst kind of health conditions I have ever seen."

Military officials had considered other places to relocate the villagers, including Seattle, but they finally decided on places like Funter Bay, Lekanof said.

"I don't know why they placed us there when other places were available," he said.

The bill went before the House Judiciary Committee last week for a mark-up session, but did not pass through because some technical changes were needed, according to an aide for Young.

The bill will again enter a mark-up session this week, and supporters say they foresee no further problems.