

Sen. Backs Pribilof People In Quest for Benefits

Committee on Commerce
United States Senate
March 9, 1966

Mr. Nicolai Melovidov
St. Paul Island, Alaska

Dear Mr. Melovidov:

This is intended to respond to your good letter of March 1 and the enclosed petition, filed by 140 Pribilof residents concerning section 209 of the pending Pribilof legislation. Section 209 provides for retirement credit for service performed by island workers prior to January 1, 1950.

As I reported in my wire dated February 28, I will do everything possible to see that section 209 is retained in the bill. In this regard, however, you will be interested to know that the Civil Service Commission has recommended that section 209 be deleted. The following is quoted from the Civil Service Commission report to the Senate Commerce Committee:

"Section 209 proposes to grant civil service retirement credit for service performed by natives of the Pribilof Islands prior to January 1, 1950 in the taking and curing of fur seal-skins and in other activities connected with administration of the islands, as determined by the Secretary of the Interior from records available to him.

"Before 1950 the relationship of the Pribilovians to the Department of the Interior was more like that of ward to guardian than employee to employer. The year 1950 marks the point at which, through the introduction of cash wages and other measures, the relationship became one of employee to employer, and service has been creditable toward civil service retirement since that time. The Commission opposes the granting of service credit for other than service as an employee. Therefore, the Commission recommends that section 209 be deleted."

Needless to say, I do not agree with the position taken by the Commission. If the relationship between the Department of the Interior and the Pribilof workers before 1950 was not that of employer and employee, legally speaking, the fact is that the Pribilovians performed work which benefited the government of the United States. It is not the fault of the workers that they were not paid wages prior to 1950.

I will do what I can to convince the Congress that the retirement benefits provided for in section 209 of the bill are needed and deserved by the Pribilof residents.

With best wishes, I am

Sincerely yours,
E. L. Bartlett

CC: Honorable William A. Egan
Honorable Hugh J. Wade
Representative Carl E. Moses
Mr. Roy Peratrovich
Mr. C. Howard Baltzo
Mr. Howard Rock
Mr. Benjamin Merculief