

Young supports AFN stand on rural subsistence priority

by Geoff Kennedy
for the Tundra Times

Rep. Don Young, R-Alaska, supports the Alaska Federation of Natives' position on subsistence.

The AFN proposes amending the State Constitution to set up a subsistence priority for rural residents.

"It's going to be hard to do. Don't kid yourself," Young told the *Tundra Times* recently. But he considers the AFN proposal the best way to replace

the law struck down by the State Supreme Court last December.

Young vehemently disagreed with Canadian jurist and Native rights advocate Thomas Berger. At the Tribal Government Conference Feb. 14 in Anchorage, sponsored by the Alaska Native Coalition, Berger proposed setting up a Native preference for subsistence hunting and fishing.

But Young dismissed Berger, who

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spent two years gathering testimony in 60 villages in Alaska, as someone who merely tells those who pay him what they want to hear.

And the Congressman criticized Berger for treating Alaska just like Canada. The two are in Young's words, "apples and oranges." He says the Canadian North has different tribal structures and isn't isolated geographically from the rest of that country the way Alaska is.

Young accused attorneys for Native groups of doing a disservice to those who pay them.

"The most disgusting thing is to see white lawyers sucking the blood of Native corporations," he said.

The congressman also criticized village Alaskans who support amending the State Constitution to set up a subsistence law with a Native preference.

"They're attacking the whole concept of a united Alaska," he said.

Young warned that such a law would divide the whole state and set off a non-Native backlash of bigotry.

Young sees his role as bringing together the state and Native leadership. But he distinguished between

Native leaders and those he called "agitators." He said some of the people who want to set up a Native preference subsistence law really want to set up their own nation.

Young compared such persons to those who want to eliminate any subsistence priority. He said any time he works to devise a workable compromise, he runs into special interest groups that demand a law just for "their own special benefit."

If Alaskans fail to resolve their differences, he said, they'll create a vacuum for animal activists to fill. He said such activists could convince Congress Alaskans have plenty of hunting land. That, he said, could mean a ban on subsistence as well as sport hunting on all federal lands in Alaska.

For much the same reasons, Young opposes amending the 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Act in order to replace the current rural preference with a Native preference.

He considers that strategy too risky. The anti-hunting movement is growing stronger in other states, he said, and anti-hunting advocates could persuade Congress to ban all hunting on federal lands.