

AFN and the Udall Bill

The decision of the Alaska Federation of Natives last week to support the Udall Bill On D-2 public interest lands classification with some modification, rather than developing a separate position, took a lot of people by surprise, including us. An initial reaction of many people may be one of complete shock at the idea of AFN conditional support of the "give away" HR 39 proposal. After all, doesn't it call for "locking up" 114 million acres of Alaska in permanent federal ownership?

On the surface, Native support of the Udall Bill is not a pleasant prospect. However, upon closer examination, it begins to make more sense.

First of all, doesn't it make sense to support a proposal which enjoys the overwhelming favor of the Congress in exchange for such benefits as full implementation of the Native claims act? As in the OMAR, Alaska Gas Line fiasco, most big Alaska interests are ignoring the mood of the nation and the congress and steadfastly supporting one proposal.

It's like two delegations of lobbyists getting on the airplane to head back to Washington, D.C. to try to influence the Congress. One delegation believes the only route to their final destination is via Madagascar and travels for a month before arriving in the capitol. The other delegation checks the airline schedules and arrives at their destination promptly after one refueling stop. It is quite probably that the Natives may accomplish desirable objectives by accepting the facts as they are and turning them to their advantage. On the other hand, Mr. Stevens, Mr. Hammond and Mr. Young may spend the rest of the summer touring Africa.

Secondly, the writing is on the wall as far as the State of Alaska's response to subsistence needs of Native peoples. We get so sick and tired of state game officials saying that "the game belongs to all the people" and "all Alaskans have an equal right to it." Things are going to be so equal around Alaska soon that our fish and game will be exterminated by a million of us equal folks shooting up the country. Nothing will be left for people in the villages to subsist upon. And after its all gone, urban folks will complain about paying taxes so that people in Emmonak will have money to buy Spam and canned peas instead of hunting and fishing. If it takes a Udall Bill to keep Native families in fresh meat and fish, than so be it. The State will do nothing.

The third reason it is a good idea is because it is the Native position, adopted after careful review of all options by the AFN, in consideration of our subsistence needs and greater implementation of the Native claims act. It is a good position. It is the Native position. The Tundra Times is behind it one-hundred per cent.