

Senate D-2 filibuster

Alaska's two Senators have been threatening for weeks to block passage of an Alaska federal lands bill in the Senate. The House has already passed such a bill by a hefty margin.

Senators Ted Stevens and Mike Gravel, who are strongly opposed to the House version of the comprehensive land classification package, seem hopeful that after this fall's general election, the halls of Congress will be inhabited by a greater number of pro-development legislators, assuming that throwing the d-2 issue back to the House to start from scratch, which their delaying tactics would do, would result in a "better" House bill. On this assumption, the Senators want to stop the momentum that has developed to complete d-2 work this year. In other words, they want to:

1. prolong the uncertainty over how subsistence resources are going to be managed by state and federal agencies, and threaten the protection of millions of acres of habitat needed to support fish and wildlife;
2. delay Congressional blessing of the State of Alaska's long awaited Statehood land entitlement program;
3. complicate, rather than simplify, the fight over some of the d-2 questions which the Senators feel the House has not answered in the best interests of Alaska;
4. put off consideration of amendments to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act designed to make the cumbersome machinery of ANCSA implementation serve the original, honorable purpose for which it was intended—protection and recognition of Native land rights.

We hold the assumption that next year's Congress will be more sympathetic to the Senators' pro-development stance to be tenuous at best. This premise is particularly shaky considering that veteran Washington Representative Lloyd Meeds, who fought long and hard, albeit unsuccessfully, in the House for the type of d-2 bill that Gravel and Stevens want, will retire this year.

Senators Stevens and Gravel, should they choose to pursue their ill-conceived and short-sighted filibuster, would surrender a far better chance at altering the d-2 bill than that provided by waiting for a different Congressional attitude that might never materialize. Should they go along with the 1978 d-2 deadline, they might find it relatively simple to extract concessions from environmentalists anxious to have a bill on the President's desk by the end of the year.

A last point not accounted for in the Senators' strategy is that prolonging the uncertainty over this federal land legislation can only add to the deep-rooted pessimism one now finds throughout Alaska's economic community. Far more than large parks and wildlife refuges themselves, which will have positive economic value for the state, delay in drawing final park and refuge boundaries will only keep the brakes on Alaska's post-pipeline efforts to build financial stability and security for the future.

We vote no on filibuster.

J.R.R.



Alaska's Senators Gravel and Stevens during D-2 hearings before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on May 23.