

ANCSA amendment to enroll 20 as Natives

It's taken an Act of Congress, but 20 Alaskans are on their way to becoming enrolled as Natives under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

The Senate Energy Committee has accepted without objection an amendment to ANCSA that would allow the 20 to be enrolled in Cook Inlet Region Inc.

ANCSA requires persons to either demonstrate that they're either one-fourth Native or that the Native community accepts them as Natives.

The president of the Kenai Natives Association provided an affidavit acknowledging such acceptance.

But the ANCSA roll was technically "closed" since 1981. So the Bureau of Indian Affairs blocked the enrollment.

Some of the Natives then hired an attorney to negotiate with the Interior Department for them. When negotiations broke down, 13 of the Natives sued the department.

Then the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs decided to revoke the

decision to enroll the 20 persons. That decision also prevented them from enrolling under 1987 ANCSA amendments.

In their responses to the lawsuit, neither CIRI nor the KNA objected to enrolling the 20 persons. But late last year the KNA Board of Directors

voted to oppose the enrollment.

Sen. Frank Murkowski, R-Alaska, offered an amendment to delete all references to the KNA in the bill. Murkowski's amendment also protects CIRI from having to provide land for the individuals and to pay retroactive dividends to them.