

Senate committee approves 1991 bill

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A 1991 bill developed by Sen. Frank Murkowski was passed by the U.S. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee Wednesday on a 17 to 1 vote.

Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., cast the only dissenting vote on the bill, which is aimed at continuing restrictions on the sale of Native corporation stock beyond 1991.

The Senate panel's action drew praise from the Alaska Federation of Natives and a vow from the Alaska Native Coalition to continue to lobby

for changes in the legislation.

It also drew praise from Murkowski.

"The Alaska Federation of Natives, their president, Janie Leask, and all their representatives involved in this issue worked very hard and did an extraordinary job in pulling everybody together," he said. "This bill represents the best possible consensus. It's a historic and monumental effort by the Alaska Native people in the spirit of compromise."

AFN President Janie Leask announced that AFN is very pleased with the passage of the bill by the

committee.

"This marks another big step for the 1991 legislation. The Senate substitute bill is a significant improvement over the bill which failed to pass the Senate committee last year," she said. "We look forward to the committee's report of it to the Senate floor and to getting the bill passed this year."

Leask said the bill will be thoroughly discussed in workshops and on the floor of the upcoming AFN Convention Oct. 22-24 in an effort to inform the delegates of its provisions. The workshop and convention proceedings will be covered live on the

Rural Alaska Television Network.

ANC Chairman Willie Kasayutlic had a different view, however. He said it's not too late to correct the bill, but "it's going to take a united Native front."

In a statement issued from Washington, D.C., after the committee passed the bill, Kasayutlic said the ANC will continue lobbying Congress until the bill becomes law.

"We aren't going to stop until we win. Too much is at stake here," he said. "The bill was supposed to ensure continued Native ownership of

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Native corporations and land. It was supposed to offer a way out of the corporate system. It does neither of these things.

"We had hoped to correct these flaws during the markup. Unfortunately, even though many committee members expressed great sympathy for our concerns, they said only a united Native position would bring about changes in the bill now."

Bingaman, at ANC's request, has agreed to offer amendments to address ANC concerns with the legislation.

In a more detailed statement to the

press about the bill, Kasayulie said the bill affords no realistic way out of the corporate world.

He said it fails to provide any protection for developed or leased lands because its land bank protections cover only undeveloped and unleased lands, leaving the core areas of the 200 Native villages which are developed or leased with no protection and vulnerable to loss through taxation, condemnation, bad debts or bankruptcy.

Kasayulie also criticized the bill because it would authorize the issuance of stock to non-Natives in some cases and because it does not have a provision allowing the transfer of cor-

porate assets to "qualified transferee entities," such as tribal councils.

"In short the Murkowski substitute satisfies neither its intended goals nor our concerns," he said. "It provides

no protection for the most valuable land; it opens more doors to non-Native takeovers than it closes, and it offers no way out of the corporate system."