

Editorial Comment—

Importance of Sea Mammals to Natives

There is a strange and unbelievable move in the Congress of the United States to restrict, and control, the killing of sea mammals by the people of Alaska. This move, if successful, would kill the unique cultures of Alaska's Natives on the coastal regions of the state. It would not only severely restrict subsistence hunting but it would spell an end to the traditional arts and crafts that have been integral parts of the colorful cultures of our Native peoples.

Those colorful cultures and traditions would not have been established without the sea mammals the Native people hunted and depended upon from time immemorial. The animals made it indeed possible for the Natives to survive the severe environments of Alaska. Thus we have the whaling cultures of Point Hope and Barrow peoples. We have the walrus cultures of the St. Lawrence Islanders, King Islanders and Little Diomed Island people. Without these animals, the people of the respective regions would not have had food to survive. And they would not have had the warm clothing vitally needed today for the same reasons.

The measure has already passed the House of Representatives overwhelmingly. The way it is now, it is a real threat to the way of life of Alaska's Native people. It would eat into the very spirit of the Eskimos — their cultures that have enabled them to triumph over the dangers of the Arctic.

The House version of the bill sneaked by the people of Alaska. There was little testimony from Alaska people. The Senate version of it must not come out without hearings involving Alaskans and most assuredly the Native people. There should be field hearings in strategic regions of the state. There must be an understanding of the situation — the understanding of the relationship and importance of mammals to the Eskimos. This must be done because the House version of the bill is dealing with the very lifestyle of the Eskimos.