

Alaskans must support subsistence

by Congressman Don Young

WASHINGTON, D.C. — For more than 30 years, Alaskans have fought battle after battle so that we could make the important decisions about how we want to live in our state.

OPINION

These have been long and hard battles, but Alaskans have generally stood united behind our efforts for state's rights. Yet, we still have a long way to go until we achieve all of the promises made to us by the federal government at statehood.

We are now at a crossroad on an extremely important issue to Alaska — subsistence.

It's unfortunate that after all these years of slowly but surely making progress, we find ourselves on the verge of losing control of our fish and game to the federal government. This would be a sad moment in Alaska's history.

The subsistence issue is complex. There's no doubt about it. But I feel that the major problem can be summed up quite simply: Do Alaskans want to continue to have self-determination over our fish and game rights, or do we want to give the management back to Congress and the federal government?

I believe most Alaskans want to continue our self-determination. I have fought too many battles in Congress protecting Alaska's self-determination on various issues to think that Congress or the federal government would act in the best interests of our people and the state.

Just think back to what Congress and the federal government have sought to impose on our state:

- The D-2 lands act which locked up 104 million acres.

- The Tongass Wilderness issue which threatens the livelihood of 3,000 to 6,000 families in Southeast Alaska.

- The Trans-Alaska Pipeline issue where many members of Congress wanted to lock up Prudhoe Bay.

I fear that the federal management of fish and game in Alaska could be used by those who would stop all economic development in Alaska to shut down the state, period. If you worry about the impact of wetlands policy on economic development, you should be equally concerned about federal fish and game management.

Federal control of fish and game is a tool in the hands of a future administration unfriendly to Alaska, which could be devastating to the state's interests.

Gov. Steve Cowper has called for a special session of the Alaska Legislature to immediately address the subsistence issue. I commend the governor for taking this action and I, along with Sens. Ted Stevens and Frank Murkowski, both R-Alaska, support the adoption of a constitutional amendment to keep Alaska's management of fish and game.

It's our hope that the Legislature will support putting this issue before the Alaska voters so that Alaskans can make the decision about the future of fish and game management in Alaska.

But what happens if people are not given the vote? Quite simply, the federal government and Congress will take over the management. At this time we are fortunate to have an administration in the White House that works closely with the Alaska Congressional Delegation and is primarily supportive of our self-determina-

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tion. I consider President George Bush and Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan as personal friends, true allies of the state.

But what happens when there is a new administration calling the shots? What happens if we end up with another Jimmy Carter and Cecil Andrus? Do we want to take the chance of the federal government dictating how fish and game are managed in Alaska when we have the opportunity to preserve our self-determination right now?

Although there have been reports that the interim regulations proposed by the federal government mean little change from the state system, almost all Alaskans know better. Ultimately,

bag limits, licenses and hunting and fishing seasons will be determined by federal policy spurred by national organizations and congressmen who don't even live here.

And I don't have to remind Alaskans that there is a growing movement on the East Coast that wants to ban hunting, period. Their voices are heard in Washington, D.C. This would be wrong and would have a significant negative impact on the lives of all Alaskans. And remember, Alaskans know better than anyone that in the long run there is no such thing as a "benign" federal takeover.

So what can Alaskans do? First of all, we must remain united as Alaskans. We must not let this become an internal battle between urban versus rural, Native versus non-Native, sport hunter versus subsistence hunter. This is an issue of Alaskans controlling the right to determine their own futures. This requires passage of a constitutional amendment by the Legislature.

In essence, what the Legislature will be deciding during the special session is quite simple: They will vote to determine if the people of Alaska will be able to vote to choose the future of



wildlife management in this November's General Election.

If this is accomplished, Alaskans will be given the chance to decide if we want to continue state management of fish and game, or if we want to turn it over to Congress and the federal government. As an Alaskan who loves the outdoors and the hunting and fishing that makes our Alaskan lifestyle special, I will vote for state management this fall.