

Decision near on Aleut reparations

By **BILL HESS**

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Early and unofficial reports from the Nation's capitol indicate that reparation payments of \$5,000 each are being considered for Aleuts who were evacuated and relocated to refugee camps during World War II.

While officials at the Aleutian/Pribilof Islands Association say the \$5,000, if true, is not what they proposed to the Presidential/Congressional commission looking into the matter, they also stress that it would be a recognition of culpability by the U.S. government on what happened to the Aleuts during the war.

"We don't even know who released the information about the \$5,000," said Philemon Tutiakoff, chairman of APIA. The nine-member Commission on the Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians is expected to make its recommendations on what should be done to redress the Aleuts and the 120,000 Japanese-Americans who were held in internment camps.

"We want to see a fair reparation," said Tutiakoff. "We want scholarships for Aleut students, improved health care, renovation of our churches. Facilities are needed in our communities." There is also talk of a clean-up of war debris left throughout the area. "If they're willing to do this, they should allow APIA to administer it so it will be done in a way that is more meaningful," said Tutiakoff.

During hearings held in Alaska in September of last year, many Aleut survivors of the relocation testified that much of what happened to them was unjustified, unnecessary, and improperly managed. After the Japanese bombed the Dutch Harbor-Unalaska area and captured Attu Island, the U.S. gathered up the Aleuts of the Western Aleutian Chain and the Pribilof Islands and moved them to abandoned canneries and other camps in Southeast Alaska.

There, 25 percent of them would die. They would eventually return home to find many of their churches looted and destroyed and their sacred icons missing. Their homes would be vandalized and ruined, their cultural artifacts carried off by souvenir hunters.

Many spent close to three years in the camps, although the Japanese threat had been neutralized shortly after they left their homes. In Unalaska, only civilians of one-eighth Aleut blood or more had been required to leave.

In the Pribilofs, the men of the islands were brought back, many by force, to harvest seals for the government while their women and children stayed in the unsanitary and ill-equipped camps at Funtier Bay. Once the seals were harvested, the men were also moved back to the camps.

Greg Braelsford, President of APIA, said that although the \$5,000 was not the figure proposed by the World War II Relocation Task Force of APIA during a recent trip to Washington, "we feel our position has been recognized by the commission . . . in terms of the government acknowledging its culpability in what happened."