

Editorial

Has your village ratified AFN's proposed legislation?

We salute the ongoing efforts of the Alaska Federation of Natives to secure implementation of critical policy recommendations put forward by the Alaska Natives Commission. This includes several proposals that AFN is asking the Congressional delegation to campaign.

The bi-partisan, state-federal commission spent more than a year investigating the chronic social and economic problems facing Native villages, and developing a comprehensive plan of action to resolve them.

AFN's congressional initiative prompts three strongly-felt notes of caution.

First, many of the struggles facing Native villages today stem directly from the deficiencies and failed promises of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971. That measure, which addressed and enacted without sufficient consultation and concurrence by all Native villages. This must not happen again, especially with such vital legislation. We call on AFN to go the extra mile to insure that all villages have an equal and ample opportunity to understand the proposed policies and to help shape its final form. With all due respect, we admonish village leaders to do their part to insure effective liaison with AFN.

Second, in the service of good communication and truly workable solutions, we ask AFN to work very closely with the Alaska Inter-Tribal Council to develop and advocate these proposals.

Finally, one of the most important attributes of the Alaska Natives Commission report is that its recommendations are comprehensive. AFN has been advised, apparently by the Congressional Delegation, that policy proposals stand a better chance of passage if advanced in smaller packages.

This may be true, but it's also well known that the Delegation strongly opposes some of the recommendations which would do the most to address village concerns.

A segmented approach makes it easier for the Delegation to pick some proposals and reject others. This would seriously compromise any possibility for the restoration of dignity, self-determination and hope for villages.

Native strategists at both the local and statewide level should be alert to this danger and resist too much fragmentation of the ANC proposals. The saying applies; "united we stand, divided we fall." A Delegation slogan might be "divide and conquer." It is better to work a little longer and get it right than losing the inevitable battle before it even starts by giving into the seductions of political expediency.

One final word, get out and vote. Those who do not vote cannot complain about the results.