

# **Soviet, Alaska visa free travel to be reinstated Border panel formed**

**by Holly F. Hallam**

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U.S. and Soviet officials recently agreed to allow Alaska and Soviet Eskimos visa free travel between Alaska and the Soviet North.

The bilateral agreements are expected to be formally signed in the early fall.

The agreement represents the renewal of an agreement terminated in 1948. Many relatives and friends haven't seen one another since that time.

The initial agreements will allow 90-day visa free travel for Alaska and Soviet Eskimos with cultural and/or family ties to one another.

The agreement also defines certain areas in which travel is allowed, and requires that individuals have a government approved invitation.

Caleb Pungowiyi, president of Kawerak, Inc. in Nome, said the final details of the agreements are still being ironed out.

Pungowiyi said that being able to travel back and forth freely is a little more complicated than it sounds. Individuals must really have strong ties, such as blood relatives or descend

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from the same tribe. The means of travel will also have to be defined.

"We are very excited about this, but we also understand these are just the first steps before it's really finalized," Pungowiyi said.

Pungowiyi was one of the 82 passengers aboard the historic Friendship Flight 1 in 1988 from Nome to Provideniya. While in Provideniya he found two relatives and said he has many more in the Soviet Union that he would like to meet.

The second part of the agreement will establish an Alaska-Soviet border commission consisting of six individuals, three U.S. and three Soviet.

In addition to border tasks, the border commission will help coordinate emergency medical evacuation situations in the area.

Maj. Gen. John Schaeffer, who will accompany Gov. Steve Cowper to the Soviet Far East later this month, said Alaskans and Soviets have already been cooperating in this area.

"We've already worked with the Soviets during the search and rescue of the walrus hunters. They even let us search by ourselves on their lands. And they helped us with the whales," Schaeffer said.

Schaeffer, head of the Alaska Air and Army Guards, said he is concerned about the Bering Strait region when it comes to search and rescue missions. The entire area is frozen much of the year.

Schaeffer hopes to establish a direct communication line so both sides of the Strait can assist each other when emergency situations occur.