

SENATOR GRAVEL'S TUNDRA TIMES REPORT

Focus on Native Arts and Handcrafts

By MIKE GRAVEL
U.S. Senator, Alaska

The Smithsonian Institution here in Washington recently opened a year-long exhibition of Haida, Tlingit, and Tsimshian art work. The exhibit, to run through November of 1974, consists of a collection of wooden objects made in the late 19th century by our Alaskan and British Columbian Natives.

'BOXES AND BOWLS'

The Smithsonian maintains a National Collection of Fine Arts, part of which is on display at the Rendwick Gallery, near the Capitol. The exhibit features elaborate wooden bowls and boxes carved by these coastal Natives.

Some of these detailed and beautiful works are decorated with inlaid shell, and all are prized examples of the delicate workmanship of these Indian groups.

AMERICAN ARTS AND HANDCRAFTS BILL

At a time when the whole pattern of American life is undergoing considerable change, it is especially important to encourage the continued development of such Native arts and handcrafts and the skills which produced them.

To that end, two bills have been introduced in the U.S. Senate; I am proud to serve as a cosponsor of both these important pieces of legislation.

The first measure, to promote the development of American arts and handcrafts, would provide government assistance in the training of people interested in designing and producing Native works of art.

It would also establish an Office of American Arts and Handcrafts and a National Center for American Arts and Handcrafts. The center would provide facilities for craftsmen and for the display and sale of such works.

AMERICAN FOLKLIFE CENTER

A second bill aims at establishing an American Folklife Center. The Folklife Center could make grants, loans, and scholarships to individuals or groups.

It could fund research, training, exhibitions, workshops, crafts and music festivals, and other endeavors to preserve and support American folklife.

BRIDGING THE GAP

It is a sad fact of life that relatively little is known of Alaska's Native folklore, of Native artifacts, languages, and traditional ways of life. It is not just the young Native Alaskans who are particularly affected — non-Indians are involved as well.

It is my firm conviction that increased understanding of various ethnic backgrounds will con-

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Sen. Gravel . . .

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tribute to a lessening of tensions and a better understanding among all citizens. There is a gap which must — and will — be bridged.

The Haida, Tlingit, and Tsimshian art exhibit here in Washington should serve as a beginning, a base on which to build. It will be a great tragedy if knowledge of the arts, crafts, and traditions of the First Americans disappear from the contemporary scene.