

# Federal withdrawal from Pribilofs approved by House

The U.S. House of Representatives Monday voted to end decades of domination of the Pribilof Islands by approving a \$20 million appropriation to help develop industry on the islands independent of the fur seal harvest.

By a voice vote taken in surprisingly quick time, the House approved legislation which now goes to the U.S. Senate for approval. The House legislation had been proposed by Alaska Rep. Don Young.

Under the federal withdrawal plan, a one-time payment of \$20 million will be paid to a Native non-profit corporation to help islanders change their economic dependence on the seal harvest and to help pay for expenses during the transition.

The plan also calls for federal property to be turned over to islanders.

"For too long the Natives of the Pribilof Islands have been totally dependent on the federal government for their livelihood. These Americans are anxious to become responsible for their own future and to create industries which will make them self-sufficient," said Walter B. Jones, D-N.C., chairman of the House Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee which last week recommended House passage of the Pribilof bill.

While the plan states that the purpose of the \$20 million is to help the islanders develop an economy that doesn't depend on the seal harvest, islanders are not prevented from using the money for sealing operations.

The bill also allocates \$736,000 for seal research. Under the proposal the money could be used in part to develop harbors to help islanders take advantage of the rich fishing areas surrounding their islands.

St. Paul and St. George both lack natural or man-made harbors and have been unable to take advantage of the fishing grounds in the area.

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# Pribilof bill passes House

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The State of Alaska also has granted the islands \$6 million to help develop harbor ports. Gov. Bill Sheffield has asked for \$10 million more for harbor construction this year.

But, while the money will be helpful for islanders, no one is predicting a rosey future because of it alone.

John Katz, Sheffield's liaison in Washington D.C., testified last week in a hearing on the Pribilof bill that the state is worried that it might have to assume a financial burden for Pribilof social services and other expenditures when the federal government leaves.

Katz said that \$20 million is much less than will be required to transfer to local control those programs that the federal government had been administering.

Katz said that when the federal government pulls its support of social service programs, the islands will have to compete for social service funding with other Alaskan communities.

The Pribilofs have been controlled by one outside group or another for more than a century when the seal harvest was first discovered.

For years after World War II islanders were kept in virtual slavery by the federal control of the seal harvest and only repeated reports by the Tundra Times and other news agencies forced a more humane treatment of islanders.