

**Testimony  
of  
Rebecca Knight  
Before the Petersburg Borough Assembly**

**Dec. 7, 2020**

My name is Becky Knight and I am here to speak to you regarding Senator Murkowski's proposed Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act Fulfillment Act of 2020 (S. 4889) introduced by Senator Murkowski on Nov. 10.

While I continue to respect the deep cultural ties of Alaskan native people to the lands of SE Alaska, the premise for this bill is flawed. Various agency officials including the Dept. of Agriculture Undersecretary, the Department of Interior Assistant Secretary, and the Department of Indian Affairs Director wrote and testified before Congress in 1996 and 2015 regarding very similar versions of this bill. Accordingly, they reiterated that natives from the five communities of Tenakee, Petersburg, Wrangell, Ketchikan and Haines were found ineligible for village status because they failed to meet the ANCSA criteria for eligibility. This was not an "oversight" or an "inadvertent" omission. It was an informed, considered, and an intentional determination under ANCSA. I sent you the officials statements on Nov. 16, which contain far more detail to support the determination than I can summarize in my five short minutes here.

It is notable that these high level agency officials expressed deep concerns that opening up so-called "Landless" Native claims could create a Pandora's box of other Alaska native claims, upending ANCSA and setting up a perpetual effort to achieve total parity among all villages in the state. It would be is reckless to do so.

The ANCSA criteria for village eligibility was: (1) 25 or more natives were village residents on the 1970 census, (2) the village was not modern or urban in character, and (3) the majority of the residents were native.

Natives from these communities were enrolled as "At-large" shareholders of Sealaska and receive benefits that shareholders with "Village" status do not. For instance, they receive regular ANCSA 7(i) financial distributions beyond that of "Village" shareholders. The "Urban/At-large" shareholders for the Spring 2020 and Fall 2020 Sealaska Shareholder Distributions were just over \$1,300 and \$1,200 respectively, while village shareholders received far less at \$332 and \$398 respectively.

In fact, as ISER's Director Lee Gorsuch wrote in his December 7, 1993 letter to KFSK reporter Amy Miller (to correct the record re. her inaccurate news story):

*"We did not, as you report, make a finding that Congress has inadvertently omitted the study villages from land benefits, nor did we recommend that Congress should now award them land. We did not, as you implied, say that the study villages were entitled to the same economic benefits as Southeast Alaska communities with village or urban corporations have received."*

Moreover, during deliberations for the 2014 Sealaska Bill, Senator Murkowski, on a Petersburg campaign stop, took questions on a variety of topics. Inevitably, her 70,000 acre 2014 Sealaska carve out from the Tongass came up for discussion. One member of the public remarked that, "...much of Southeast's residents cannot help but feel being played as hostages and political pawns in this legislation." Senator Murkowski, responded that she truly "regrets the anxiety and tension that the Sealaska bill had created in our small towns," and recognized that, the legislation "...pitted neighbor against neighbor" and that the "resentment is not good for communities." Those were her words.

Finally, in a press release the day the Sealaska legislation passed, Murkowski declared, **"Some 43 years after passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, the federal government will finally finish paying the debt we owe Natives for the settlement of their aboriginal land claims,"** yet very shortly after that press release, she introduced a similar version of this bill, and now this latest version. Murkowski's definition of "final" depends on her political whim to provide timber to the export timber industry in SE Alaska. Clearly, the regret she expressed about the impacts to small communities of her continual land grabs and resource exploitation was short-lived and insincere.

Thank you,

*Rebecca Knight*

Rebecca (Becky) Knight