



STATE OF ALASKA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
JUNEAU

June 19, 1984

Representative Sam B. Hall, Jr.
Chairman, Subcommittee on Administrative
Law and Government Relations
House Committee on the Judiciary
U. S. House of Representatives
B 351-A Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, D. C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

It is a pleasure to have this opportunity to present the views of my administration concerning the compensation of Alaska's Native Aleuts for injustices and losses experienced during the World War II military occupation of the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands. Through H.R.4322, the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands Restitution Act, Congress recognizes the suffering, hardship and irreparable losses of the Aleuts. I urge passage of this measure.

The Aleuts here today will express much better than I could the personal and cultural tragedies that occurred as a result of United States policies. I will briefly summarize the report of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians to emphasize the debt owed to the Aleuts and to show that some acts occurred for which no compensation can atone.

In June and July of 1942, 881 Aleut citizens of the United States were forced to leave their homes, most on less than 24-hour notice. They were permitted to take with them virtually none of their worldly possessions. Many were held by the federal government under conditions described as "deplorable" by the Commission until as late as April 1945, long after the threat of Japanese aggression had passed.

The Aleuts are a hardy and resourceful people. For some ten thousand years, they have carved out an existence in one of the most physically forbidding parts of our inhabited world, developing in the process a wealth of tradition, cultural pride, and religious faith. Truly some of the first Americans, their contributions to the settlement and development of this continent are thoroughly chronicled and documented.

These proud people were herded into reeking, often unheated quarters and denied proper food, medical care, sanitation, privacy, education and the dearest of all American rights, freedom. For three years they suffered under these conditions, watching their numbers gradually fall as tuberculosis, pneumonia and other diseases took their toll. Almost one out of every ten eventually died for reasons related to their internment. Many of those who were lost were the elders who sustained the Aleut culture.

The report of the relocation commission tells how U. S. military occupation forces had pillaged and ransacked the Aleut homes and left their islands dangerously strewn with discarded military paraphernalia and live ammunition. Priceless and irreplaceable icons were gone forever. Family possessions were plundered and destroyed. Homes were unusable or razed and had to be totally rebuilt by the Aleuts, who by this time had few resources at their disposal, some communities could never be rebuilt. The combined effect of these policies and actions was very nearly the total loss of a people and culture from their ancestral homeland.

Not only do the Aleuts merit the compensation contained in H.R.4322 for their suffering during World War II, but they deserve assistance from the federal government in order to shake off the remaining effects of that terribly destructive period on their social and economic structure, to strengthen their community and cultural identity, and to have equal opportunity in order to achieve a life style of their choosing based on traditional values in their historical homeland.

Without the compensation in H.R.4322, they do not have the resources needed to restore their churches and artifacts and to clear their homeland of the dangerous military debris that threatens their safety and impedes development.

The State of Alaska urges the United States Congress to enact H.R.4322 which will give the Aleuts the central responsibility in planning for and administering the trust funds and the activities that will restore the communities and the land.

Consistent with the provisions of the Act, the Aleut people do have the capability of carrying out these provisions without the direct on-site management of federal agencies. The Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association is an organization that does have the leadership and management capacity, and as a representative of the Aleut people, the mandate to effectively act on behalf of the beneficiaries of this bill.

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In the same manner, the Aleutian Pribilof Housing Authority has the experience and an effective management that will apply local knowledge and involvement to the clean-up project.

The provision relying upon the local Aleut people for their leadership in implementing H.R.4322 is appropriate and is consistent with many other efforts throughout Alaska to look first to entities managed by the local residents to establish their goals and to accomplish them.

I emphasize that this action by the Congress will not diminish the participation of the Aleuts in all service and capital programs developed and administered by the State of Alaska. The State is enacting its own legislation and taking steps to assist in the development of the economic self-sufficiency and future viability of the Aleutian Pribilof region.

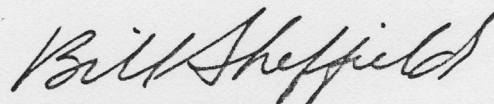
Our commitment is, and will continue to be, to the present and future development of Alaska. H.R.4322 recognizes the United States' obligation for specific past actions.

I also wish to express my support for the compensation of Japanese-Americans for their internment and personal losses during the same period. Many of these citizens live in Alaska and contribute greatly to the cultural and economic strength of our state. The injustice that they and their families experienced during World War II can be neither justified nor fully compensated.

I wish you well in the conduct of these hearings and believe you will receive testimony to highlight both the need for these measures and the plans for implementing the measures authorized. I feel hopeful that H.R.4322 will receive favorable consideration by this committee and the Congress.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Sincerely,



Bill Sheffield
Governor