

Petersburg Borough Assembly,

Recently the Borough Assembly voted to reject the rights of their Native American citizens to participate in their right to recover and own a very small percentage of the land that was appropriated from them. Unfortunately, Native people did not realize and understand the concept of paper ownership of land until it was all taken from them and redistributed amongst the non-native population. In today's world, it would be paramount to someone coming to your house speaking a foreign language and saying the government has seized all your property and you do not own it any longer. Also, we are going to take your land and give it to our friends and someone will now live in your house. I ask, how you would feel if that was the case with you and your family, no land, no home and very little self-worth left. Although this was just an illustration, it none-the-less is the reality Native people faced. This is not a poor me illustration, nor is an attempt to illicit any sympathy but it is glimpse at a past that was evident throughout Southeast Alaska.

The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act returned a very small percentage of that land back to Tribal Corporations and regrettably, five communities were left out of that Act, Petersburg, Wrangell, Haines, Tenakee and Ketchikan. The Landless Committee met recently with the Petersburg Borough Assembly and orally or in writing answered all the questions the Assembly posed. As a result of our meetings and subsequent communications, we were very surprised when the Bourgh Assembly did not support the Petersburg Landless legislation.

We have been a people who have strived for recognition these past 50 years since ANCSA passed, because, all of the communities were recognized with the exception of the 5 communities. Those 5 communities known as the Left outs, the Land-less and now, Natives Without Land, continue to contest for our land. Unfortunately, even with those communities who benefit from our Corporate status the most, the communities we call home.

Some may ask why were these communities left out of the original act, the reason is simple, there is not an explainable answer to that question. Juneau, Sitka, and Kodiak were awarded their land and Corporate status but the like communities of Ketchikan, Petersburg, Haines, Tenakee and Wrangell were denied participation.

I think we need to discuss the economic benefits that are associated with the Corporation in your community. Number one of course is jobs, Native Corporations historically have created more opportunities for employment in the communities that received Corporate status. Next, is of course the goods purchased from vendors, local businesses, and sometimes individuals in the community. This of course is a real plus in a community where seasonal work has been the norm because more local orders in a community, means more hours for a community member to be employed

Secondly, business development, it is the opportunity of a lifetime, to have a corporation that has a community ingrained D.N.A., to promote ideas and to find ways to make the community a vibrant area for people to want to live. The Corporations throughout southeast and in Alaska have come up with many successful community endeavors that do not impose on existing local business but in many ways enhance that business and as such the other businesses in the community.

Let's take some time to talk about some concerns we hear, will the Corporation cut down trees: The answer is simply, yes, if the corporation deems it a viable opportunity to create meaningful revenue. That being said, this isn't the 1970's anymore, trees are also valuable if you don't cut them down, when they are used for Carbon Credits. Carbon Credits in a nutshell are a way for emission producing businesses like coal and gas to lease good positive emission land that is preserved much like the conservation community would do. One could argue that those companies still pollute the air, which is true but now they have to lease land from the Corporation that will omit positive carbon in the air and it is a win-win for Alaskans, they keep their trees, they keep their clean air and maybe they make the air a little cleaner for the rest of the United States. The loggers are not overly

comfortable with Carbon Credit tracts but that is not to say that some of the trees owned by the Corporation would not be allocated for harvesting. It is a balance the community will have implied input in, the Corporation of course will be run by its Board of Directors, who will naturally be sensitive to the community needs. It is true the Corporation will decide how to use its resources to generate revenue for the Corporation, but it will always know that it is a part of the larger community. Will local business be supported, yes, whenever it is feasible, because the Corporation is Native owned and owned by the Tribal members of Petersburg, so of course they want their community to flourish.

To summarize:

The Corporation and Land selections are an opportunity for each community. They will purchase local goods, sponsor community activities as well as community projects and they will often be a major part of the process of the revitalization of the community itself. This is not a Native-White issue anymore, it is an issue about the economics of the community and that is why I would implore you to rethink your vote and reconsider the positive benefits of a local Tribal Corporation, that will create employment, which will create the payroll to buy goods sold in Petersburg stores and will create a better sense of well-being for all in the community.

I would encourage the Petersburg Assembly to retract their vote of non-support of their landless citizens and instead support a bill that benefits all of Petersburg directly and/or indirectly.

Sincerely,

Randy Williams

Randy Williams
President, Natives Without Land, Ketchikan