



Senate Hearing on Contracting Preferences for Alaska Native Corporations Held

Juneau, Alaska – Sealaska Director, and Executive Director of the National Congress of American Indians, Jackie Pata testified to the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Contracting Oversight today. Senator Claire McCaskill, chair of the subcommittee, called the hearing to examine the impact of Alaska Native Corporations' contracting preferences within the U.S. Small Business Administration's 8(a) program.

Congress authorized Alaska Native Regional and Village Corporation's (ANCs), Indian tribes and Native Hawaiian Organizations participation in the program to advance self-determination and promote economic development. American Indians and Alaska Natives are among the most economically distressed populations in the United States.

The program is working as originally intended according to Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski who offered testimony at the hearing. "We need to preserve this program which is a matter of existing Federal Indian Policy," she said. "There are few business models that can meet the great promise for economic development. Changing the program puts us on a road to breaking another promise we may be forced to apologize for in the future."

According to Pata, the SBA program is vital for building internal capacity within the Native corporations and tribal member shareholder employment continues on a growth trajectory as education and leadership programs grow. "Tribes and ANCs use internships, scholarships, on the job training, and subcontracting opportunities to build their own talent," said Pata. "Sealaska is a perfect example with many of its executive and subsidiary management having benefited from the company's scholarship and internship programs."

Sealaska has provided scholarships to more than 3,000 tribal shareholders and provided internship opportunities to more than 200 individuals. "Benefits derived from the government contracting program go beyond and have begun to take hold and advance self-determination, ensure cultural preservation and improve dire social conditions," stated Pata.

The size of the federal contracting market has increased substantially in recent years; however, the federal government's statutory goals, which are intended to ensure small business participation, have remained stagnant. "The federal procurement market is huge, and there is plenty of room for tribal and ANC and all minority businesses to participate," said Pata. "In fact, I urge Congress to increase opportunities for all small businesses by increasing agency contracting goals and size standards, as well as increasing the thresholds for individually owned 8(a) companies."

"Limiting tribal government enterprises' and ANCs access to the federal marketplace will have devastating effects on Native communities. Tribal governments will need to look to Congress to establish additional tools to deal with the critical need to strengthen local tribal economies so that tribal governments will have more, not fewer, resources and opportunities to provide programs and services for their citizens."

“We should all be working to improve programs like 8(a) that create economic opportunities in rural Alaska and throughout Indian Country.”

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Sealaska, a Growing Tradition

Sealaska has strengthened business with culture since 1972. We are a Native corporation owned by more than 20,000 tribal member shareholders and guided by our traditions of environmental stewardship and positively impacting our communities.

Sealaska has been involved with 8(a) federal contracting since 2004. Currently just over 13-percent of Sealaska’s revenue is derived from SBA 8(a) contracts.

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