Sealaska Vice Chair Testifies on Changes to Migratory Bird Treaty Act

H.R. 3109 would amend the act

JUNEAU, Alaska – Sealaska Vice Chair Jacqueline Pata testified before the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs regarding H.R. 3109. The bill, introduced by Congressman Don Young, would amend the Migratory Bird Treaty Act to exempt traditional and customary Alaska Native handicrafts from being penalized.

In her testimony, Pata said she believes there are misconceptions about the use of migratory bird parts. “There are erroneous assumptions that convey a false impression that this amendment will facilitate an exponential growth in the use of migratory bird parts or feathers,” said Pata. “This is simply untrue. Alaska Native people are not looking to commercialize the use of feathers, but rather to continue a tradition and culture that respects our ancient cultural values and the principles of conservation and allows a small number of Alaska Native artists who have fashioned painstakingly and with great skill the art, handicrafts and clothing in the footsteps of those who came before them.”

Sealaska Heritage Institute sought an amendment to the federal act to ensure Alaska Natives and American Indians would not be prosecuted for traditional and customary uses. Members of Sealaska’s board and management often testify before Congress for the advocacy and passage of important legislation that positively affects our people. Cultural use of feathers became a legal issue for a Sealaska tribal member shareholder who wasn’t aware of prohibitions.

In 2012, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service told Sealaska shareholder and award-winning Tlingit carver Archie Cavanaugh that he violated federal law for a headdress made with flicker feathers. Cavanaugh advertised the headdress was for sale. In an interview with the Associated Press, Cavanaugh stated, “They told me that under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act they can charge me up to $10,000 and throw me in jail for a couple of years. And they told me that under the Lacey Act they could charge me up to $100,000 and put me in jail for 10 years. It was very scary. I went into complete depression.” Cavanaugh worked with prosecutors to pay a much smaller fine and avoided formal charges.

“We find it disheartening that the federal act and subsequent regulations were certain to preserve the rights to make and sell pillows, blankets or fishing flies,” said Pata. “Unfortunately, protecting Alaska Native culture and its utilization of migratory bird feathers and parts was less important in 1918.”

Read full testimony of Sealaska Vice Chair Jacqueline Pata

View statement from Sealaska Vice Chair Jacqueline Pata
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BURAulgQwBs&feature=youtu.be

Sealaska, Values In Action
Sealaska is the Regional Native institution established under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (ANCSA). More than 21,600 tribal member shareholders of the Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian own Sealaska. Sealaska’s purpose is to strengthen our people, culture and homelands through values in action.

Contact:
Dixie Hutchinson
Cell 907.209.1022
dixie.hutchinson@sealaska.com
Find Sealaska online: www.sealaska.com