



Alaska Federation of Natives 2008 Political Platform

The Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) hereby adopts and endorses the 2008 Political Platform of the National Congress of American Indians, entitled “Empowering American Indians and Alaska Native Governments and Their Citizens by Supporting Sovereignty, Economic Opportunity, Education, Cultural and Religious Freedom and Quality of Life.”

In order to articulate other critical issues that are unique to Alaska Natives and Alaska Native Communities, AFN hereby urges the U.S. Senate, the U.S. House of Representatives, the national political parties, and the candidates for President and Vice President to pledge their support for the following principle: take innovative steps to ensure that Alaska’s traditional Alaska Native villages remain vibrant and sustainable communities.

Sustainable Alaska Native Communities

Alaska’s traditional Native villages represent an important part of Alaska’s cultural heritage. But those villages disproportionately bear the brunt of cultural, economic and environmental change. To ensure that our grandchildren enjoy the same benefits that we do from the existence of vibrant traditional Alaska Native communities, we propose the following concrete steps to shore up the economic foundations of those communities.

Supporting the Alaska’s traditional Native villages is a policy initiative comprised of the following elements:

Support the conversion to renewable resources for electrical power and space heating. Alaska has one of the highest per capita rates of energy consumption among the states. Alaska’s per unit cost of energy is also among the highest in the country. This dire situation is exacerbated in Alaska’s traditional Native villages, communities which tend to be rural and off of the interconnected road system. Innovative solutions are needed to support and sustain the energy needs of these villages while absorbing the shock of the recent escalation in energy prices.

The federal and state governments are in critical positions to stabilize energy costs and provide immediate relief for individuals, families and communities in Alaska that have been hit hardest by current high energy costs. In the richest country in the world, no citizen should have to choose between heating their home and feeding their children. While this is a global problem, it is particularly acute in rural Alaska where gasoline prices in some villages have gone as high as \$11 per gallon. Our communities are not located on large power grids and depend on petroleum for three major uses: heat; transportation and electricity.

The federal government, working with the State of Alaska should adopt a role that enables the deployment of private capital to bring renewable energy projects on-line to support rural communities. In order to have a meaningful impact, the governments' effort will need to greatly accelerate the ordinary project development schedule. The government can fill this role by providing loan guarantees to reduce the cost of capital, adopting a risk mitigation role with regard to construction cost overruns, assuming a share of risk of a less-than-expected magnitude and quality of the renewable resource, and by accelerating the approval of necessary permitting.

The federal government should double the federal Production Tax Credit for renewable energy projects that serve rural Alaska communities.

In order to support the long-term viability of the energy component of the villages' rural economies, the renewable facilities should be designed and constructed to include support for space heating.

Given the long lead-times necessary to move from dependence on fossil fuels to alternative and renewable energy sources, Congress should continue in its efforts to increase the overall supply of energy by encouraging environmentally sound exploration for and domestic production of Alaska's oil, gas and coal reserves on private, state and federal lands, both onshore and off-shore. This can be done by providing incentives, such as OCS revenue sharing for Alaska's coastal communities, as has been done for Florida, Louisiana and Texas.

Congress should work closely with the State of Alaska to ensure that in the development of a natural gas pipeline in Alaska our communities have access to the natural gas that will pass through that pipeline through in-state spur connections.

Alaska Native tribes and corporations must also be ensured full participation in the economic opportunities provided by resource and infrastructure development in Alaska, including employment, partnership and contracting opportunities.

Preserve and support the rural subsistence priority of Title VIII of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). Subsistence has been a critical component of the local economy of Alaska's rural communities. That role has been heightened by the recent increase in energy costs. The rural residents of Alaska's traditional Native villages depend on local subsistence resources for their day-to-day economic existence. Title VIII of ANILCA provides a preference for rural Alaska residents and is an important management component to ensuring that these residents have the first opportunity to harvest necessary resources and put them to their economically highest and best use.

Subsistence is also spiritually important and the cultural foundation of Alaska's traditional Native villages. Perhaps no issue is of greater importance to Alaska Natives than the right to hunt, fish and gather according to customary and traditional practices,

and to carry on their “subsistence” way of life for future generations. In enacting Title VIII of ANILCA, Congress recognized that the continuation of the opportunity for subsistence uses was “essential to Native physical, economic, traditional and cultural existence.” In order to ensure that residents of Alaska’s Native villages are able to continue to live a subsistence way of life for as long as they chose to do so, the Administration must reject any attempt by the State of Alaska or special interest groups to repeal or weaken federal subsistence protections.

The Administration must also give a broad interpretation to Title VIII’s statutory terms so that small rural communities dependent upon subsistence do not lose their “rural” status and thus their eligibility for subsistence due to increased competition for the resources because of their location on the road system or close to a large population center.

Support local economic development, including the continuation of the Small Business Administration’s (SBA) 8(a) program. Both the State and federal governments must redouble their efforts to initiate and foster local economic development in rural Alaska, including support of the SBA 8(a) program. Few private sector development dollars flow into Alaska’s rural and remote traditional Native villages. Accordingly, the State and federal governments share a leadership role in fostering and developing local, private sector economies in Alaska’s villages. One program with a proven record of success in this regard is the SBA 8(a) program. It fosters self-sufficiency and returns revenues to underserved Native communities while delivering efficient contract performance at fair and reasonable costs to the U.S. Government.

Assist Alaska’s coastal communities in adaptation and mitigation to the negative effects of global climate change. Science has shown that the most direct and severe negative impacts of global climate change are borne by the coastal arctic communities of Alaska. Accordingly, the federal government should directly support adaptation and mitigation activities, including relocation if necessary for those Alaska villages that are bearing the brunt of the coastal erosion, rising sea levels, thawing permafrost and other negative effects of climate change.

Support Alaska Native communities in their efforts to deliver appropriate levels of health care and core BIA funded services. The federal government must provide an adequate budget for the Indian Health Service (IHS) to bring the highest quality health care services to American Indian and Alaska Native individuals and communities. Addressing substance abuse and suicide among Alaska Natives and Alaska Native youth, in particular, must remain top priorities. The 2009 IHS budget should have increases, rather than decreases in spending for the urban Indian health program, health care facility construction, health professions, and alcohol and substance abuse.

The BIA Tribal Priority Allocation (TPA) funding is of critical importance to tribes and tribally authorized consortiums. It is used to provide basic services to tribal members, including services to children and families, Vocational and Higher Education Scholarships, native allotment management services, Adult Basic Education, Housing

and other vital services. Yet, the BIA TPA budget has not increased since the onset of the Cobell litigation. Congress must increase BIA TAP funding levels in an amount commensurate with the higher cost of providing services, the increased number of tribal members and the increased level of need.

Initiate, with local community involvement, an overhaul of the public education system in Alaska's communities. It is incumbent on both and federal and state governments to improve public education opportunities in Alaska communities with the goal of achieving lower dropout rates and higher graduation success rates, which significantly better the chances for people in our communities to live successful, self-sufficient lives. Components of education reform to be considered include the delivery of a higher level of vocational training at the high school level, possible establishment of regional support schools and the repeal of the No Child Left Behind Act as it pertains to Alaska.