

Now we look forward to the next 40 years of ANCSA. I call on my colleagues in this Chamber to work together to help all American Indian and Alaska Native people gain their economic independence. Through ANCSA, we see this happening in Alaska. Alaska Native groups are proud of their culture and heritage but also of their business success. We all should be proud of this success.

In Alaska, we innovate. We rely on fresh approaches to solve our unique challenges. The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act is such an example. It was a monumental act of Congress—one my father pushed forward and I know is profoundly successful and one that today I profoundly defend.

With our national economy in its current state, we need more of this in America. We need to lift our people to build capacity and to allow the first people of this Nation to succeed. When that happens, we all benefit.

Madam President, Senator MURKOWSKI and I ask you and our colleagues to support this resolution to recognize and honor the impact and importance of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. More important, it honors Alaska's first people and their extraordinary accomplishments over the past 40 years.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

NOMINATION OF MORGAN CHRISTEN

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, I feel as if this is a little bit of Alaska day here. We just celebrated the very successful nomination of Morgan Christen to the Ninth Circuit. I am really quite proud of Morgan and her accomplishments. As an Alaskan and as an Alaskan woman, to achieve what Morgan has achieved, to be the example she has set makes me quite proud today. So I am pleased the Senate gave her such a resounding confirmation. This is quite significant for us, and Alaskans are feeling good today.

40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ALASKA NATIVE CLAIMS SETTLEMENT ACT

Ms. MURKOWSKI. As Senator BEGICH mentioned, Alaskans are celebrating other occasions this week as well.

I rise today to speak about a resolution Senator BEGICH and I have submitted that recognizes December 18, 2011, as the 40th anniversary of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. Our resolution recognizes and commends the significant achievements Alaska Native people have made over the past 40 years through their congressionally created Alaska Native corporations.

Not only has the Alaska community risen to the challenge of creating sustainable businesses, but they have created employment opportunities for our

Nation's citizens really across the country—not just located in the State of Alaska but really all across our country and through the world. Alaska Native corporations continue to make significant contributions to their communities, our Nation, and the global economy, and for this they should be commended and they should be applauded.

Our resolution encourages the citizens of the United States to acknowledge and support the leadership and continued efforts of Alaska Native people in managing their resources through the Alaska Native corporations. The resolution also sends a strong message of support to thousands of Alaska Native youth from across the State who are working and contributing positively to their families and to their communities, focusing their efforts on earning a college education, participating in cultural activities, and realizing a dream that they may one day earn places of leadership within their own corporations. Their efforts are recognized and appreciated.

Over this coming weekend, Alaska Natives and advocates from across the United States will participate in community dialogs and celebratory events to reflect upon what has been accomplished over these past 40 years since passage of ANCSA. Participants will focus on the next steps that are needed to improve upon the continued success and the unity of Alaska Native tribes, villages, and our corporations.

Through their participation and commitment to management of their resources through the vehicle of Alaska Native corporations, many young Alaska Native people will embark upon a lifetime journey of service, community engagement, and philanthropy. Alaska Native corporations have afforded a unique opportunity for Alaska Native people to gain valuable insights into the business world, while maintaining thoughtful focus on issues concerning Alaska Native tribes and communities.

The next generation of Alaska Native people will continue to make positive changes in the world around them through acquired leadership skills, cultural advocacy, and community engagement, and through their dedication and enthusiasm, the next generation of leaders honors the previous generation of Alaska Native leaders who really worked so very diligently to achieve the passage of the most significant Native lands settlement in our Nation's history.

In addition to all of the very remarkable young people who will one day be managers and policymakers of their Native corporations, I honor the work of those who contributed to the success of the passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. It was no easy feat negotiating this very complex piece of litigation. It took the drafters years for the settlement to be discussed, to be interpreted, analyzed, debated, negotiated, and finalized. It was truly an accomplishment.

While no piece of legislation can claim perfection, the original drafters of the ANCSA bill worked tirelessly to achieve a fair and a just settlement for the native people of Alaska and the ever-evolving document has had a number of significant amendments that have considerably improved the original bill.

While a list acknowledging all of the Alaska Native leaders and advocates who worked on the act would prove impossibly long, I wish to recognize a few of the people who have since passed, who played an instrumental and an unforgettable role in its passage.

First, U.S. Secretary of the Interior, Secretary Udall. I had both TOM and MARK UDALL sitting right in front of me before I began my comments here. It is a tribute to him that he did so much in his service as Secretary of the Interior. Also our own Senator Ted Stevens and his efforts; U.S. Congressman Nick Begich, who was instrumental in passage of ANCSA, and Morris Thompson, who is an Athabaskan out of the Koyukon area. It was back in 1966 that Stewart Udall, who was Secretary of the Interior then, responded to pleas from Alaska Native groups, imposed a "land freeze" on all land in Alaska under Federal control, which amounted to about 96 percent of all the land in the State at the time. Secretary Udall helped develop a program for solutions to the Native land claims issue throughout the State. Although ANCSA at that time was still in its infancy, the freeze prevented the transfer of all remaining Federal lands and would remain in effect until the Native land claims were resolved. Without that freeze, the Alaska Native people might have won their claim but they may not have had lands to select.

Senator Stevens, in his role, called his work on the unprecedented landmark legislation of ANCSA his Senate baptism of fire. In a 1991 newspaper article, the Senator is quoted as saying that he believed a settlement could be achieved because of his "faith in the determination and the unity of purpose of Alaska's Native people." Senator Stevens was one of the advocates who pushed for the 40-million-acre land provision versus the 1 million acres the White House had initially proposed.

With threats looming that subcommittee sessions would be called off, which would effectively end a negotiated settlement, Congressman Nick Begich played a key role in keeping the legislative process moving. By the end of the negotiations, the subcommittee package was a tribute to the Congressman's role as architect of the House compromise. One veteran lobbyist said:

It is the best individual achievement I have ever heard of for a freshman Congressman.

I would be remiss in not mentioning the very unforgettable Morris Thompson. At 34 years old, Morris was the youngest commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. He held a Cabinet position in the Nixon administration and,