



Testimony of Ethan Tyler

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Introduction to Alaska Native Corporations and Land Ownership

Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Dexter, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Ethan Tyler, Sr. Director of Public Policy and Lands for The Aleut Corporation – or Aleut., one of the 12 land-based Alaska Native Regional Corporations established under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971. ANCSA was landmark legislation—the largest land claims settlement in United States history—that resolved long-standing aboriginal land claims between the federal government and Alaska Native people. Rather than creating reservations, as had been the practice elsewhere in the country, Congress chose a different path for Alaska. ANCSA transferred approximately 44 million acres of land and nearly \$1 billion in compensation to newly created, Native-owned for-profit corporations, organized by region and village, and charged them with both the preservation of cultural identity and the pursuit of economic opportunity. This model was unprecedented in Indian Country and has since drawn national and international attention as a unique approach to Indigenous self-determination and economic empowerment.

Aleut, along with our sister Alaska Native corporations, holds title to millions of acres under a complex ownership structure of fee simple, surface, and subsurface rights. These lands are not merely assets on a balance sheet—they are ancestral homelands, imbued with generations of history, subsistence, and cultural meaning. At the same time, ANCSA tasked us with operating as modern corporations, with the responsibility to generate economic benefits for our Alaska Native shareholders, their families, and their descendants. This dual responsibility—to serve both as stewards of the land and as engines of economic development—creates a model unlike any other in the world. It is a model that demands balance: protecting sacred lands and traditions while also ensuring economic opportunity, education, healthcare, and connection to culture for our Alaska Native shareholders. This ownership provides both an opportunity and a solemn responsibility—to ensure that these lands provide for our shareholders today and for generations to come.

Alaska Native Corporations and Our Role in Resource Development

Alaska Native Corporations (ANCs) are both landowners and economic drivers. We are unique in that we hold responsibility for lands with extraordinary resource potential while recognizing the importance of preservation and stewardship for generations of shareholders stretching far into the future. Aleut's mission, as with all ANCs is not only to generate profits, but to translate those profits into Alaska Native shareholder dividends, educational scholarships, cultural preservation programs, and vital community investments. Simply put, Aleut's mission is to maximize dividends and opportunities for our Alaska Native shareholders.

Through partnerships with best-in-class industry leaders, Aleut, like many of our sister ANCs, engages in resource exploration and development projects across minerals, fisheries, and energy. These partnerships bring cutting-edge technology and investment into some of the most remote regions of the country, while also grounding development decisions in local knowledge and cultural context. While Aleut is in the early stages of exploring our resource potential, the outcome of these partnerships is envisioned to be one that creates jobs, builds local economies, and contributes to both Alaska's and America's resource security. Aleut's accountability to our Alaska Native shareholders—our families and communities—ensures our commitment to both responsible development and long-term stewardship.

The Uniqueness of the 7(i) Provision in ANCSA

I want to highlight an important and defining provision in ANCSA: Section 7(i). This revenue-sharing mechanism requires Alaska Native regional corporations to share 70 percent of their net revenues from resource development with the other regional corporations.

The purpose of this provision was simple yet profound—to ensure that no Alaska Native community was left behind simply because their lands did not contain oil, gas, timber, or mineral deposits. The leaders who negotiated ANCSA understood that Alaska is a vast and diverse place. Some regions are endowed with rich mineral or energy resources, while others are not. Without revenue sharing, the benefits of development would have been uneven, concentrating wealth in a few regions while leaving others with little economic opportunity.

Section 7(i) was designed to prevent that outcome. It was built on the traditional value that the wealth of the land should benefit the aggregate community, not just the few. In this way, ANCSA reaffirmed the deep cultural understanding that we are stronger together—that prosperity should be shared, and that the settlement had the potential to bind all Alaska Native people into a common future.

To put this in perspective, imagine if a corporation like Amazon were required to share 70 percent of its profits with Apple, Microsoft and Google. No other corporate system in the world has such a provision. And yet, for more than 50 years, Alaska Native Corporations have upheld this principle. While there have been challenges and complex negotiations along the way, the spirit of 7(i) endures as one of the most powerful testaments to the vision and Alaska Native cultural values imbued in ANCSA.

Importance of Alaska's Natural Resources and ANC's Role

Alaska is blessed with abundant natural resources that are not just important locally, but globally. From oil and gas to fisheries, from gold and copper to renewable energy potential in wind, hydro, and tidal systems, simply put, and as outlined in the President's Executive Order "Unleashing Alaska's Extraordinary Resource Potential": Alaska is a resource powerhouse. Renewable energy in remote Alaska is often a valid and viable option over alternative energy sources. ANCSA gave corporations like Aleut the ability to manage and develop these resources responsibly. We approach development with a dual lens—economic and cultural. Development must bring economic opportunity to our Alaska Native shareholders, but it must also respect and preserve the lands and waters that sustain us culturally and spiritually. ANCs have pioneered models of development that emphasize local hire, environmental accountability, and reinvestment of profits into community well-being. By keeping decision-making authority close to the ground, we have been able to balance the drive for progress with the need for preservation.

Alaska's Role in National Security and Mineral/Energy Independence

The strategic significance of Alaska cannot be overstated. Our state holds vast reserves of oil, natural gas, and critical minerals like copper, rare earth elements, and precious metals that are essential for clean energy technologies and defense systems. In addition, Alaska's location on the Pacific Rim and in the Arctic makes it a frontline region for both economic and national security. The President's Executive Order titled 'Unleashing Alaska's Extraordinary Resource Potential' acknowledges that tapping Alaska's resources is not only an economic priority, but also a national security imperative. By responsibly developing these resources, the United States can reduce dependence on foreign adversaries for critical supplies, strengthen energy independence, and maintain military readiness. ANCs are ready to serve as partners in this mission, leveraging our land ownership, local knowledge, and commitment to national interests to advance both security and prosperity.

Overview of the Aleutian Islands and the Aleut Region:

The Aleutian Islands stretch nearly 1,200 miles westward from mainland Alaska, forming a chain that arcs deep into the North Pacific and the Bering Sea. This region is one of the most remote parts of the United States, with communities separated by vast ocean distances, limited transportation links, and some of the harshest weather conditions in the world. The population across the Aleutians is small, spread among a handful of villages and towns, many of which are accessible only by boat or aircraft.

Infrastructure is limited compared to the rest of the country. Communities rely heavily on marine transportation and small aircraft, and essential services can be delayed for days or weeks during severe weather. Despite these challenges, the Aleutians are home to two critical pieces of infrastructure that stand out:

- **Cold Bay** hosts one of the longest runways in Alaska, capable of handling large military and commercial aircraft in nearly all weather conditions. It serves as a vital emergency and logistical hub for the region.
- **Adak**—the westernmost city in the United States—has extensive infrastructure inherited from its days as a Naval Air Station, including a deepwater port, fuel storage, and a large runway. While the population is now small, these facilities remain strategically valuable.

The Aleutians occupy a position of immense national security importance. The chain sits at the intersection of the North Pacific and the Arctic, along air and sea routes increasingly contested by Russia and China. During World War II, the Aleutians were the site of the only battles fought

on U.S. soil in that war. During the Cold War, Adak served as a critical forward operating base. Today, as great power competition intensifies, the Aleutians once again represent America's front line—an outpost on the edge of where U.S., Russian, and Chinese strategic interests converge.

For the Aleut people, this region is not only our homeland but also a place where the interests of our nation and our communities intersect. The remoteness, the limited infrastructure, and the small populations underscore the challenges of daily life, but the presence of world-class runways, deepwater ports, and resource-rich lands highlights the enormous potential of the Aleutians to serve both our people and our country's defense.

Strategic Importance of Adak and Aleut's Interest in Defense Collaboration

Adak's position makes it an indispensable asset for U.S. national defense. During World War II and the Cold War, Adak served as a critical base for projecting power and monitoring threats across the North Pacific and the Bering Sea. Today, with growing challenges from China and Russia in the Pacific and Arctic, Adak once again stands as a key outpost. Aleut owns significant land and infrastructure in Adak, including former Navy facilities, and we are eager to work with the Department of Defense and other federal agencies to ensure that Adak remains ready to meet emerging security challenges. As both landowners and Alaska Natives with deep roots in the Aleutians, we see defense of this region not only as a matter of national strategy but as a responsibility to our Alaska Native shareholders' homeland.

Adak is a vital strategic asset in the North Pacific. We stand ready to be long-term, collaborative partners at any level of military re-engagement. Aleut's vision centers on Adak's unmatched geographic value, its existing infrastructure, its potential for rapid response and surveillance operations, and its capacity to support national security goals while also generating meaningful regional development.

Aleut is committed to:

Infrastructure Renewal: Supporting investment in infrastructure modernization and remediation as both a military and regional development opportunity.

Community Resilience: Advocating for balanced federal investment that strengthens both national defense and essential services such as Alaska Native health, education, and economic security.

Forward Planning: Positioning Adak for future defense or interagency use, ensuring its readiness regardless of current operational plans.

Aleut sees Adak as a platform, ready to serve the nation's strategic interests while creating jobs, strengthening defense readiness, and reinforcing U.S. presence in the North Pacific and Arctic.

Pier 5 rehabilitation:

Aleut is leading a major infrastructure upgrade at Pier 5 in the Port of Adak, backed by a \$10.2 million Port Infrastructure Development Program (PIDP) grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation Maritime Administration. Construction is expected to be complete in 2026.

The funding for these upgrades was approved in 2022, and in addition to engineering and design for the renovations, the environmental work through the regulatory framework has been daunting. While various agency staff have been as responsive as current staffing levels allow, navigating the complex web of environmental permitting has been challenging for our engineering partners, along with our own best-in-class organization, and at times has slowed the project, and even put into question its viability. Sequential or linear processes for agency review rather than parallel efforts contributes to the permitting challenges.

In addition to the challenges of regulation – the lack of understanding about realities of operating a large construction project in remote areas of Alaska is often lost on those manning a desk on the other side of the country. Contending with barge schedules, tight summer construction timelines, weather and limited transportation are just a handful of unique Alaska considerations that could fill an entire day of testimony – highlighting the importance of local decision-making and regional knowledge being vital to resource development in Alaska.

Highlighting Aleut Projects

Despite the remoteness of the region, there is a history of mineral development in the Aleutian Islands, and Aleut sees the potential for renewed development opportunities into the future. Aleut is actively engaged in projects that demonstrate our ability to partner responsibly with industry and government:

- **Heliostar's exploration on Unga Island is uncovering high-grade gold deposits.** This project represents the promise of responsibly developing Alaska's mineral wealth to meet growing global demand, while also creating jobs and opportunities in remote communities.
- **Copper Bay Resources is exploring copper north of Sand Point,** a resource vital for the clean energy transition, from electric vehicles to renewable energy infrastructure. Alaska's copper resources are of national importance, and Aleut is proud to be at the forefront of advancing this sector.

Both development projects are in their exploration phase. As the need for critical minerals grows, and the need to source these resources from the United States becomes more acute, the timelines placed on bringing these prospects from exploration to production is daunting.

King Cove Road and Aleut's Support for the Land Exchange

The proposed road between King Cove and Cold Bay is not just a transportation project—it is, quite literally, a matter of life and death. King Cove is a community of fewer than 1,000 people, located at the end of the Alaska Peninsula. While it is a vibrant fishing community and home to many Aleut shareholders, its remoteness presents daily challenges, especially when medical emergencies arise.

For decades, the people of King Cove have advocated for a road that would provide reliable, year-round access to Cold Bay's all-weather airport, one of the largest and longest runways in Alaska. That airport can accommodate large aircraft in conditions when smaller planes in King Cove cannot fly. Without a road, residents facing medical emergencies must rely on small aircraft or boats to make the trip across treacherous terrain and waters—often in hurricane-force winds, snow, and heavy seas. Tragically, lives have been lost because evacuation was not possible during extreme weather.

Aleut strongly supports the land exchange necessary to make this road a reality. This solution has been carefully designed to balance environmental concerns with humanitarian needs. The proposed route represents a common-sense compromise that respects the land and environment, while addressing a community's critical need to be connected to important transportation infrastructure.

Despite the overwhelming support of local communities, multiple Alaska Native organizations, and the State of Alaska, this project has faced persistent regulatory and legal challenges for decades. While litigation and bureaucratic delays continue, the people in this region continue to suffer. Every winter storm without a road carries the risk of another tragedy.

I offer my thanks to Alaska's Congressional delegation and others for standing with the people of this region, and I am here to share the importance of this critical link with you today.

I urge Congress to stand with our communities and support this project—not as a political debate, but as a community necessity. For the people of King Cove, this is not about convenience. It is about survival. It is about ensuring that rural Alaska Native communities are not treated as second-class citizens when it comes to determining what happens in their own backyard. As outlined in the President's Executive Order, I ask you to help us move beyond decades of delay and finally deliver this lifeline for the region.

ANCSA Rights to Develop Resources and ANC Stewardship

Under ANCSA, Alaska Native Corporations were granted the right to develop resources on our lands as we see fit. This right is not taken lightly. We understand that with it comes the responsibility to manage our resources wisely and for the benefit of all shareholders. No one is better positioned to balance development and preservation than Alaska Natives themselves, whose connection to the land spans millennia. ANCs are unique in the corporate world because our bottom line is measured not only in dollars, but also in the health and resilience of Alaska Native people, lands, and cultures. This is why decisions about whether a project should proceed must recognize the needs of and respect local people—not just outsiders who do not understand our lands, our values, or our needs.

Regulatory Challenges and Call for Balanced Reform

While we embrace strong environmental standards, we also know firsthand how burdensome and drawn-out regulatory processes can prevent responsible projects from moving forward. Permitting delays can stretch for years, eroding investment, costing jobs, and undermining our ability to deliver economic benefits to our Alaska Native shareholders. Aleut does not advocate for a free-for-all approach; rather, we support a regulatory system that is efficient, transparent, and respectful of local decision-making. Streamlining does not mean abandoning safeguards—it means aligning regulation with common sense and with the values of the people most affected.

Commitment to Work with Congress

Aleut is committed to working with Congress and the Administration to advance balanced, common-sense solutions that expedite responsible resource development. We are grateful for the continued support of Alaska's Congressional delegation, who have consistently championed the rights and needs of ALL Alaskans. We also extend our thanks to the House Natural Resources Committee for its attention to Alaska's unique issues. By working together, we can ensure that Alaska's extraordinary resources strengthen not only our local communities, but also our state and our nation. Our lands hold the key to America's energy independence, mineral security, and military readiness. Our people hold the knowledge and commitment to steward them responsibly. We stand ready to partner with you to unlock this potential for the benefit of all Americans, now and for generations to come.

Thank you for your attention to these important issues and we greatly appreciate the opportunity to speak to them today.