

**U. S. HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON
INDIAN AND INSULAR AFFAIRS PUBLIC HEARING ON
HR 410, FEBRUARY 5, 2025**

**QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY THE HONORABLE BRUCE WESTERMAN TO NELSON
ANGAPAK, SR. AFN VETERANS COMMITTEE, FEBRUARY 10, 2025**

At the hearing, you testified that lack of land available for selection has slowed down the Alaska Native Vietnam-era Veterans Allotment Programs. There has also been a lot of back and forth from the previous presidential administrations on Public Land Orders in Alaska. The first Trump administration revoked several Alaskan Public Land Orders; however, these were subsequently reinstated by the Biden Administration. The Trump Administration once again revoked several Public Land Orders in January.

- a. Do you think that these revocations will result in more lands being available for eligible Alaska Native Vietnam-era veterans to choose their allotments from?

No. According to research done by the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN), if the Trump Administration revokes all Biden-era Public Land Orders and reinstates the orders from 2021, the land available for Alaska Native Vietnam Era Veterans and their heirs to select allotments will decrease by ten million acres. In addition, if the 2021 orders are reinstated, Alaska Native Veterans will face competition from mining and other interests seeking access to the same lands. The Biden-era orders opened approximately 38 million acres lands only to Alaska Native Veteran allotment, and for no other purposes. The 2021 orders opened approximately 28 million acres of lands for all public lands' purposes.

Representative Westerman's questions may have been asked under the assumption that Biden Era PLOs have been revoked. The Trump 2021 PLOs have not yet been reinstated by the Department of the Interior at this time.

Revocation and reinstatements of multiple PLOs regarding land for Native Allotments created confusion for many of our qualified Alaska Native veterans and their heirs regarding land. Some may have decided not to apply for allotments because of this. The confusion created by these revocations and reinstatements delayed our veterans and heirs of veterans from applying for Native Allotments.

- b. What else can be done to ensure that this 5-year extension is the only one that we will need to complete this program for all eligible participants?

Lands that have reasonable distances and access by the Veterans of the Vietnam War Era and their heirs must be set aside by a Congressional mandate. This will enable our veterans and their heirs to apply for lands as Native Allotments close to their homes; they will have cultural and linguistic ties to these lands.

Section 11, Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act

When Mr. Angapak testified in front of the subcommittee, he testified in favor of HR 410. He recommended that Congress consider setting aside lands that were withdrawn by Section 11 of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act as lands for Native Allotments.

Pursuant to Section 11 of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), 25 townships, including the core township, where the village corporation is located were withdrawn. ANCSA mandated the village corporations select the core township plus other lands to fulfill their land entitlements from these withdrawn lands. Not all the withdrawn lands were selected by village corporations. Unselected ANCSA Section 11 lands can be easily identified by the Bureau of Land Management in Alaska.

Congress must consider making all the former ANCSA Section 11 lands that were not selected by ANCSA corporations available for Native Allotments. This recommendation took into consideration that these lands are close to villages, to the veterans and their heirs, and more than likely veterans and their heirs have cultural ties to these lands. Veterans and their heirs living along the Aleutian Chain will have access to the former Section 11 lands that were set aside for their village corporations to select in their areas instead of lands hundreds of miles away.

Alaska Native Veterans of the Vietnam War Era and their heirs reside in all areas of Alaska. To illustrate this point, land in the Goodnews Bay area of southwestern Alaska will be used to answer the questions of the Honorable Westerman. Veterans living in the northern parts of Alaska, the Aleutian Chain, Southeast Alaska, and other parts of the State may be up to a thousand or more miles away from Goodnews Bay. The biggest challenge for these veterans and their heirs is access to Goodnews Bay lands. There are no interconnecting roads between the Alaska Native villages in rural Alaska, including for Goodnews Bay lands.

Even the qualified Alaska Native Veterans of the Vietnam War Era and their heirs living in the nearest Alaska Native Villages of Quinhagak, Goodnews Bay and Platinum may have access issues because there are no roads to the available Goodnews Bay lands from their villages. These three Alaska Native villages are closest communities to the Goodnews Bay lands.

Access to lands on mainland Alaska is a major issue faced by the qualified Alaska Native veterans of the Vietnam War Era and their heirs who live along the Aleutian Chain. The Alaska Native Villages along the Aleutian Chain are separated from each other and the mainland by major bodies of water such as the Bering Sea. Thus, there is no access to any land on the mainland for them other than airplanes.

Veterans living in other parts of Alaska such as Southeast and Southcentral Alaska villages have similar access issues to lands outside of their regions.

To better illustrate the distance and access issue, we looked at the home state of the Honorable Bruce Westerman. Representative Westerman's hometown of Hot Springs,

Arkansas is 1,062 miles from Washington, DC; access from Hot Springs to DC includes the I-81 N Route.¹

Representative Westerman has more means of access from his home to Washington DC than our Alaska Native Veterans of the Vietnam War Era and their heirs who live along the Aleutian Chain to the mainland areas of Alaska where the lands for allotments are located.

Congress must also set aside additional lands including the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and National Forest lands and make them available for Native Allotments. If these lands are set aside by Congress, lands needed for Native Allotments for the veterans and their heirs will be enough.

Implementation of HR 410, if it is enacted into law, will be done by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). To ensure that the program does not require further extensions and that all eligible Alaska Native Veterans and their heirs are able to receive their allotments, Congress must take the following into consideration:

- BLM's program staffing and budget should be increased. BLM remains in the process of doing outreach to ensure all eligible Alaska Native Veterans are aware of this program and can apply for an allotment.
- The larger area of selectable lands established by Public Land Order 7952 should be retained.
- The Secretary should establish a priority for Alaska Native Veteran allotments over other uses of public land.

This legislation is crucial for recognizing the sacrifices made by our veterans during the Vietnam Era. It provides an opportunity to rectify historical injustices and ensures that Alaska Native veterans and their heirs can secure their rightful land allotments. This legislation is not just about land; it's also about honoring the commitment and service of our veterans and their families to the United States of America. We urge all members of Congress to support HR 410 to ensure justice and recognition for our brave veterans.

As instructed, this is being submitted to Haig Kadian, Clerk for the Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs Committee at haig.kadian@mail.house.gov on or before February 25, 2025.

¹ https://www.distance-cities.com/distance-washington-dc-to-hot-springs-national-park-ar#google_vignette