

Native contracting benefit defended

Anchorage Daily News / adn.com

(12/22/09 21:23:06)

A U.S. Small Business Administration program that awards advantages in contracting to Alaska Native corporations is valuable to the whole state and should be continued, Congressman Don Young and Anchorage Mayor Dan Sullivan said at a news conference Tuesday. The SBA's 8(a) program is under scrutiny in Congress, where some members are discussing major changes, and within the SBA. The federal agency has proposed revisions that include eliminating Native corporations from eligibility if they grow over a certain size, and forbidding Native and tribal firms from subcontracting work to large, non-Native partners. The 8(a) program gives advantages to minority-owned, disadvantaged businesses when trying to land federal work, and it allows Native corporations and tribal firms to obtain federal contracts without limit on the dollar amount and without competition.

Sullivan said the Anchorage Assembly unanimously approved a resolution supporting continuation of the program. He and Young said it's important to "a socially and economically disadvantaged population," and that it delivers significant benefits to the state as a whole.

"This is very important to us for two reasons," Sullivan said. "Number one, it's the right thing, the fair thing to do. And number two, it's good for our economy, not only our city but our state as well."

Sheri Buretta, board chairman of Chugach Alaska Corp., said the SBA program has allowed Native corporations to survive and thrive since its inception. Many are beginning to transition out of it and into a more competitive global marketplace, she said.

"This program allows us to empower our people," Buretta said. "It's a shift from federal policy where there's a government handout. This actually creates organizations that are capable of providing for themselves, and it's a role model for our people to be able to stand up for themselves."