



Native American Contractors Association

Working to enhance the economic self-sufficiency of America's indigenous peoples

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Benjamin Wallace-Wells, Editor
The Washington Monthly
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SENT VIA EMAIL TO:
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Dear Mr. Wallace-Wells:

As an Alaska Native woman from rural Alaska and an Alaska Native Corporation shareholder, I would like to respond to your opinion piece “Polar Fleeced: Sen. Ted Stevens built a welfare state for Eskimos that made defense contractors rich.” It is truly unfortunate that you traveled all the way from Washington D.C. to Alaska and failed to learn even the rudimentary basics of Alaska Natives. To the Alutiiq people – the indigenous people of the Chugach and Koniag regions of Alaska – the word “Eskimo” often holds negative connotations and is a generalization of a people who do not consider themselves Eskimo. Your use of this term was clearly designed to perpetuate the stereotype of the poor ignorant Indians being taken advantage of by big America. As an Alutiiq person and Alaska Native Corporation shareholder I assure you, we are well aware that our corporations are successful businesses contracting with the government for our benefit.

Unfortunately, your opinion piece is littered with inaccuracies, assumptions, and fabrications. For your convenience, I have attempted to correct a few of these below:

- 1) You state that the House Armed Services Committee is conducting an investigation of two security companies in regards to their working relationship with the Alaska Native Corporations and that Congress has held hearings. This is incorrect. There have been no hearings by Congressional committees.
- 2) You state there is an “amendment” that allows Alaska Native Corporations to stay in the program no matter how large they become. This is incorrect. Every 8(a) company must abide by the size standards.
- 3) You state that Alutiiq, an Alaska Native Corporation, received a sole source contract from the Department of Energy at the Idaho National Laboratory. This is incorrect. Alutiiq has not received any kind of DOE contract for the Idaho National Laboratory.
- 4) You state that NANA Pacific received a contract which it “handed off” to a large firm for operation. NANA Pacific, like all 8(a) businesses, is required to perform not less than 51% of the complex tasks, under federal regulations, and thus could not have “handed off” the contract. Your use of such a vague phrase implies that you have no real evidence of Nana Pacific’s actions or any proof that it is not in compliance with the applicable regulations.

5) You state that, “These natives are being used essentially as fronts...because of certain privileges that only Alaska tribal corporations enjoy.” Alaska Native Corporations enjoy similar rights to Indian tribes under the Small Business Administrations 8(a) Business Development program. What evidence do you have of Native companies being used as “fronts”? If none – and again it seems safe to assume there is none because if there was evidence you would have published it – how dare you make such an accusation without proof? Does the Washington Monthly have no fact-checkers?

6) You state that, “Earlier this year, the Alaskan Natives joined with other contracting companies to found the Native American Contracting Association, a new group whose goal is to expand contracting opportunities and privileges to all American natives.” The *Native American Contractors Association* was formed in October 2003, to educate the public, policy makers and other minority organizations about the benefits of the 8(a) program for America’s indigenous peoples. The participation of America’s indigenous people’s in the 8(a) program is part of the Federal Government's fiduciary responsibility to provide for a sustainable Native economy as required by treaties, the constitution, statutes, and court cases. The 8(a) program, if taken away, will become yet another broken treaty. Frankly Benjamin, I am surprised at your blatant willingness to ‘jump on the band wagon’ against America’s indigenous peoples.

The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) was a unique settlement for indigenous people. The enterprises Alaska Natives have created are reflective of the natural resources we had and the social obligations outlined in ANCSA. Although different from settlements between the U.S. and other indigenous peoples, the Alaska Native Corporations have proved to be working as Congress intended in 1971. ANCSA has allowed many of the Alaska Native corporations to build companies with surprising value that will return benefits to the Shareholders for decades to come. Chugach Alaska Corporation's annual revenues, ability to pay dividends, provide scholarships, cultural program support, social program support and job opportunities for their shareholders and their families is an indication of the successfulness of ANCSA and the 8(a) program. As indigenous Americans we are once again proud to be Native and proud to be a part of, and integrally involved in, successful organizations that are run by Board members that we elect.

You were afforded the extraordinary opportunity to spend time with well respected Native leaders, to see a small portion of our rich culture, history and way of life and you squandered it. What a shame.

Sarah L. Lukin, Chairman
Public Relations Committee
Native American Contractors Association