

Landless Natives bill gets first hearing in Congress

by [Ed Schoenfeld, CoastAlaska News](#)

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U.S. Rep. Don Young poses in his office with Sealaska board member Richard Rinehart, left, and landless spokesman Leo Barlow, right. Barlow and Reinhart were lobbying this week for Young's landless Natives legislation. (Photo courtesy Don Young's office.)

A bill creating corporations for Native residents of five “landless” Southeast Alaska communities had its first [hearing](#) in Congress Wednesday, June 17.

Haines, Petersburg, Wrangell, Ketchikan and Tenakee were left out of 1971's [Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act](#). That bill gave land, money and corporate status to those in many other Alaska communities.

Wrangell's Leo Barlow represented landless residents at the hearing, before the House Subcommittee on Indian and Alaska Native Affairs.

“Those of us who enrolled to these five communities during the ANCSA process did so because they are our traditional homelands and places of origin. Our families and clans originated in these communities and have lived here for hundreds if not thousands of years,” Barlow said.

He said about 3,500 Tlingits and Haidas were affected. They still became shareholders of the [Sealaska](#) regional Native corporation.

Congressman Don Young, who authored [the legislation](#), chaired the committee hearing. Senator Lisa Murkowski introduced a [similar bill](#) earlier this year. Sealaska is also [lobbying](#) for its passage.

A [report](#) by the University of Alaska's Institute of Social and Economic Research found no clear reason why the five communities were excluded, other than Congressional intent.

Federal officials continue to oppose inclusion, saying it would break precedent and allow others to follow suit.

At the hearing, Young said the timber industry lobbied Congress before ANCSA passed because it wanted to keep more of the Tongass National Forest available for logging.

"The communities involved here had large lumbering, timbering operations. And there was effort put into this Congress at that time not to recognize them because it might have affected the long-term leases for that timber," Young said.

Similar legislation has been introduced more than a half-dozen times.

Supporters have suggested it would only get serious consideration after [a bill](#) turning Tongass timberlands over to Sealaska passed.

That happened last year.