

**Testimony of Zack Brink
Association of Village Council Presidents**

**Hearing
U. S. Senate Indian Affairs Committee
The Honorable Byron Dorgan, Chair
The Honorable Lisa Murkowski, Vice Chair**

**S. 2232
Foreign Aid Lessons for
Domestic Economic Assistance
Act of 2007**

Wednesday, February 27, 2008, 9:30 am

Room 485
Russell Senate Office Building

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today on behalf of the Association of Village Council Presidents to talk about the importance of Senate Bill 2232: Foreign Aid Lessons for Domestic Economic Assistance Act of 2007.

My name is Zack Brink. I am testifying today in my capacity as Executive Vice-President of the Association of Village Council Presidents whose headquarters are located in Bethel, Alaska. I have worked for AVCP for a total of 15 years. Myron P. Naneng Sr., AVCP President, was not able to attend this hearing and sends his apologies and best wishes.

On behalf of the Native people of the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta, thank you for your many years of service in the Congress, in the Senate, and on this Committee meeting here today. We are grateful for you and your staff's hard work over the years. Quyana – Thank you.

Background

By way of background, the AVCP Region in southwest Alaska represents 56 Tribes and is approximately the size of Oregon. AVCP was organized in 1964 and serves as the regional Native-Nonprofit Corporation.

S.B. 2232: Foreign Aid Lessons for Domestic Economic Assistance Act of 2007.

Our message today is that the Association of Village Council Presidents is very supportive of S.B. 2232 and urges Congress to act and pass this Bill.

For the past several years the Association of Village Council Presidents, Bristol Bay Native Association, and the Alaska Federation of Natives have been working together in an innovative manner. We have partnered together to lay the groundwork for our project and we are ready to take the next step. We have taken it upon ourselves to make the lives of our people better, and we are here to share with you how important this project is for us.

The overall goal of the project is to substantially improve the economic, educational, social health and cultural status of our people. We see these four areas of focus as tied together. It is our belief that any improvement in one area directly impacts the other areas. In our region the predominant Native language is Yup'ik. Despite a rich cultural heritage and widespread reliance on subsistence resources, Southwest Alaska has the highest poverty rates in the state, and very high instances of substance abuse, suicide, and other indicators of social health. By funding this Bill, the lives of our people in the region would benefit greatly in the economic, education, social and cultural arenas.

We want to build on what we already know that works in our region. Our strengths include our Yup'ik culture, language and people. We want to design the project to fit our region and to build on our past successes. Specifically, we want this project to work in our villages. We want to meet the challenge of reducing poverty and promoting sustainable economic growth in our rural villages.

Issues to Consider

When considering S. B. 2232 please consider the following issues:

1. **The AFN/AVCP/BBNA Partnership is working.** Over the past several years this partnership has been preparing for this. We have put considerable time, effort, and planning into the project. AVCP is committed to making it work.
2. **AVCP Region is ready to take the next step.** Our 56 Tribes met and passed resolutions in support of the project both at the regional and village levels. The AVCP Board of Directors are in full support of the project.
3. **Our strategy works for us.** The overall goal of the project is to substantially improve the economic, educational, social health and language/cultural status of our people. This strategy is holistic and it works for us in filling the gaps. We want to design our project in this manner.

4. **We want to share what we learn.** In this demonstration project we want to share what we will learn. We also want to learn from others through this model, specifically through the Millennium Challenge Corporation Model.
5. **We want to design our own model.** Lessons from a Domestic Demonstration will help all of us. The AVCP region exists in an environment of extremes. What that means is that all the economic, education, social health, and language/cultural indicators are either very high or very low. They are either at one end of the spectrum or the other. The lessons learned will help all of us.
6. **The project will take time.** We know that this will not happen overnight or just over a couple years. This is a long term project and we want it to be successful.

In conclusion, AVCP believes that this project will work and we ask for your support.

Quyana. Thank you.