February 27, 2008

Statement by

SENATOR TED STEVENS

Senate Committee on Indian Affairs

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

I’m pleased to be here this morning to offer my support for the bill before your Committee today - S. 2232, the “Foreign Aid Lessons for Domestic Assistance Act of 2007.” I introduced this bill, along with you and Senators Inouye and Akaka, in the Senate in October 2007.

Welcome to our Alaska friends who are here today to testify on behalf of this legislation - Julie Kitka, president of the Alaska Federation of Natives, Zack Brink, president of the Association of Village Council Presidents and Ralph Anderson, executive director of the Bristol Bay Native Association, and other Alaska Natives here today to offer support.

First, Madame Chairwoman, congratulations to you and Chairman Dorgan on securing passage - after 10 years of efforts - of the reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act yesterday on the Senate floor. It contains provisions that will benefit all Alaska Natives and American Indians. I am a cosponsor of that important legislation, and I look forward to its speedy consideration by the House and signing by the President.

Today, however, your Committee turns its attention to another area of critical importance to the well-being of American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians - economic success and independence.

Despite modest improvements in the economic and social circumstances of American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians, they continue to have extremely high rates of unemployment and poverty, poor health, substandard housing and the related ills of alcohol and drug abuse. Native people have vibrant cultural legacies and abundant natural resources on and under their lands and in their waters. Many Native communities have marketable timber, huge reserves of coal, natural gas, oil, fish and shellfish and other natural amenities.

At the same time, Native economies are hobbled by geographic remoteness, distance from markets and population centers, poor physical infrastructure, and a lack of governmental transparency contributing to stagnating Native American economies.

Because Native economies are often plagued by the same challenges as the economies of the developing world, Native economies are likely to benefit from the application of proven models employed in international development efforts, most notable the *Millennium Challenge Act of 2003.* This initiative aims to foster those policies that are known to be effective and reduce poverty and promote sustainable economic growth in the host country. Typically, the activities that are assisted are related to agriculture, irrigation, and related land practices, physical infrastructure development to facilitate marketing of goods and services, and a variety of health care programs.

Similarly, the objectives of the legislation before your Committee today are just as straightforward: enhancing the long term job creation and revenue generation potential of Native economies by creating investment-favorable climates and increasing Native productivity.

The Foreign Aid Lessons for Domestic Economic Assistance Act will also authorize administering federal economic development assistance by encouraging the integration and coordination of such assistance to benefit Native economies. To do that, the bill requires that any assistance provided must be coordinated with other federal economic development assistance programs for Native Americans.

Madame Chairwoman, I hope your Committee will look favorable on this legislation and work for its passage during this Congress. Our Native people are looking to us for this much needed assistance to gain economic self-sufficiency and a share of the prosperity that so many others in our nation already enjoy. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on its behalf today.