

# Alaska Legislature

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### **SPONSOR STATEMENT HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 15**

When the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) was passed in 1971, a new chapter in first peoples' history was created. Rather than being confined to the reservation system of the continuous forty-eight states, Alaska Natives had lands conveyed to them through their corporations to own. However, another tear in this transition has continued to plague the conveyance process. In December of 1998, the Department of the Interior released its required report to Congress. The report stated that approximately 650 contaminated sites were on lands conveyed pursuant to ANCSA. Because the lands are now held privately, Native Corporations are subject to liability by the State of Alaska and the Federal Government to remediate those lands. Congressman Don Young said it best "It was clearly not the intention of ANCSA to extinguish Native claims by conveying contaminated property to recipients."

House Joint Resolution 15 asks the Alaska Legislature, to encourage the United States Congress to pass legislation, holding the federal government responsible for the remediation of contaminated lands under ANCSA. It is right that operations that were overseen or accepted by the federal government should not be the financial burden of owners who had no hand in creating the environmental degradation. Native Corporations have already spent millions of dollars in remediation sites. Now is the time to hold public entities and persons accountable for shirking their responsibilities.

I urge your support for HJR 15. Our state needs to say, in a unified voice, that if private industry should be held to strict environmental standards, even from years before, than federal actions need to be raised to the same standard. We owe it to the Native Alaskan community to not have their rights trampled on yet again. Let us right this wrong.