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## A new subsistence class system

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By DICK BISHOP

Have you read the governor's newly proposed subsistence amendment for our Alaska Constitution (House Joint Resolution 41)?

If not, did you know that most Alaskans are subsistence "have-nots"? We "have-not" any subsistence tradition. Only "indigenous people of Alaska" have a subsistence tradition in this proposal, which if passed, would become part of our state constitution.

Did you know that only rural residents "have" a clear priority to take fish, game, timber, berries, water, etc. for undefined "customary and traditional subsistence uses"? Over "all other consumptive uses"?

Did you know that some people are "half-haves"? They're the city dwellers who may get a "lower priority" than rural residents for subsistence uses if they can demonstrate "customary and traditional use"--and if they don't get in the way of the rural "haves." Do you suppose they can demonstrate that, since only "indigenous people" (Alaska Natives) have a recognized "subsistence tradition"? And what the heck is a "lower priority," anyway?

Then there are the "have-nots." These are the majority of Alaskans declared, by omission, to lack a subsistence tradition. They aren't rural. They aren't "indigenous." They can't demonstrate "customary and traditional use," since they have no subsistence tradition.

These "have-nots" might have relied on fish and game for food all their lives, picked berries, cut firewood, made or used fur clothes. They might be proud to be somewhat self-sufficient and to teach their children to treasure and use wisely (conserve) Alaska's wild resources. But they have no "subsistence tradition." They live in town. They have always been called sport hunters, or sport fishermen, because they followed the regulations labeled sport fishing or sport hunting. They aren't "indigenous." They're expected to subsist at Safeway or Sam's Club, where they are certain to rub elbows with folks who have a "subsistence tradition."

The "have-nots" have no subsistence tradition to pass on. They can't adopt a subsistence tradition, or start one. They can't claim or begin a "customary and traditional use," regardless of how they make a living or what they eat. The "half-haves" might do a little better--but they are still second-class subsistence users.

Meanwhile, nonsubsistence opportunities go to the back of the bus.

How do I know all this? Why, it's right there in the governor's subsistence amendment. It spells out how, instead of equal opportunity to follow a subsistence lifestyle, if they wish, or to simply be hunters and fishers, Alaskans will be divided by where they live and who their ancestors were. And not a word about managing fish and wildlife to help everyone out.

That's not what Elizabeth Peratrovich had in mind when she spoke up for equal rights 45 years ago in the Territorial Legislature. She won. Discrimination among Alaskans was made illegal.

Why backslide into discrimination now on subsistence? Subsistence uses and lifestyles can be protected without dividing Alaskans into haves, half-haves, and have-nots. Too bad Elizabeth Peratrovich is no longer with us to again remind us that fairness comes first.

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