

Transcript of Two Interviews with Senator Stevens on APRN Nightly News  
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PART 1

**Reporter** Senator Stevens is standing firm on another rider – one that would redirect federal funding from rural tribal courts to the State. Stevens says the courts are proliferating too fast in Alaska and that threatens the balance of funding for Native programs nationwide.

**Stevens** If all the villages in Alaska are tribes, more than half the tribes in the United States are in Alaska, and if each one is entitled to a court, and each one is entitled to a judge, uh, – you see, it's not going to happen.

**Reporter** Speaking to the Alaska Press Corp in Washington today, Stevens blamed outside interests—trial lawyers and do-gooders, he said—for drumming up interests among villagers in establishing the courts. He said his rider aims at regionalizing tribal court money.

The Alaska Inter-Tribal Council contends that tribal justice systems have always existed and that funding is needed to help them interface with the Western legal system and with one another. Stevens said it's not his intent to interfere with existing traditional justice systems.

**Stevens** There is a different provision for domestic disputes to be settled by a tribe, and if – we're not arguing with that. But that does not call for a creation of a full-scale tribal court nor does it call for sovereignty and these people are blending sovereignty with this demand.

**Reporter** The Commerce, Justice and State Department appropriations bill is currently on hold, at least in part for other reasons. But today Stevens did characterize the tribal court controversy as a battle.

**Stevens** **It's a battle** I can't win, but I can't lose because I cannot get the money they demand. In the end, they will end up with a bunch of people thinking there're going to be tribal courts and they're not going to have the money to run them.

**Reporter** And Stevens went on to say that he believes that the Native sovereignty movement could become a threat to statehood.

**Stevens** **The road they're on now is the road to destruction of statehood because the Native population's increasing at a much – much greater rate than the non-Native population. I don't know if you realize that.** And they want to have total jurisdiction over anything that happened in a village without regard to State law and without regard to federal law.

**Reporter** Donna Goldsmith of the Alaska Inter-Tribal Council responded that Stevens was neither correct about what we are all saying and doing nor about who funds us to do it.

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## PART 2

**Reporter** [MISSING PORTION OF INTRODUCTION]. . . his desire to see a consolidation of funding for tribal housing into regional housing authorities. Today, Stevens confirmed he is considering language to add into the VA HUD funding bill to amend the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination, or NAHASDA, to funnel housing money into regional authorities instead of individual Native village entities. Stevens says he can't get funding for 229 separate housing authorities. He says the federal government won't support it; it's too expensive and it doesn't work.

**Stevens** We found in one area of Alaska we – we did fund those and there wasn't a house built in four years. But there are all those people out there hired to help them. But – and we raised this question once before and what happened was those people that got money and then they couldn't build houses, they went and repaired each other hom – hou – roofs or put – put up weatherization, or did something different. They used the money, but they weren't building houses. The money is really for new houses.

**Reporter** But Native American Rights Fund attorney Heather Kendall-Miller says only a quarter of the eligible tribes are using funds from NAHASDA. She says the remaining three-quarters have delegated their NAHASDA work, and that the current system does work. She says the NAHASDA program allows for new or rehabilitated housing and since 1998, the NAHASDA program has produced 3,000 units of rehabilitated housing.

**Heather** And that's one of the primary reasons why the villages want to continue to be able to manage these NAHASDA funds. They want to be able to do so because they know best at the village level what houses need to be rehabilitated and what new houses need to be built. And they can best assure that the jobs go to village people who then get the training.

**Reporter** Kendall-Miller says tribal housing authorities have to spend the majority of the funds directly on housing needs. There is a twenty percent cap on administrative costs and the average is fourteen percent. Kendall-Miller says Stevens is opposed to tribes exercising any kind of local authority. And she says the push for regionalization is being driven by misinformation. She says the Senator is not consulting with tribes and that field hearings to learn how village housing authorities are spending NAHASDA funds would be appropriate.