

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 5, 2013

Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Mitch McConnell
Republican Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable John Boehner
Speaker
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Colleagues:

While our state of Alaska is often regarded as one of the “reddest” states in the country, and our performance in recent presidential contests bears that out, we are in fact a state that is highly diverse in population, culture and tradition.


Alaska’s commitment to equality long predates its admission to statehood. Even today we take pride in the fact that Alaska enacted comprehensive anti-discrimination laws in the 1940s at the behest of a Tlingit Indian woman named Elizabeth Wanamaker Peratrovich – two decades before the Congress passed the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965.


We honor our vibrant Alaska Native community, the descendants of the first peoples who occupied the territory we today call Alaska. And we also honor those who have come from places around the world, including a significant number of refugees, who have chosen to make Alaska their home. While 88 percent of the students in the Anchorage School District speak English at home, the remaining 12 percent speak some 92 different languages when they return home at the end of the day. The five most common of these languages are Spanish, Hmong, Samoan, Tagalog, and Yupik, the traditional language of the Eskimo peoples of Southwest Alaska.

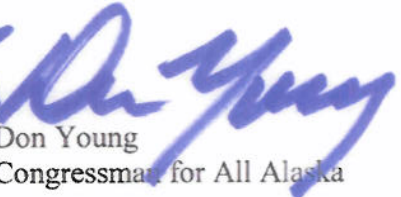
In the words of Julie Kitka, President of the Alaska Federation of Natives, “As Indigenous peoples, Alaska Natives know how much it matters to have a homeland and to belong... We want our country’s 11 million undocumented individuals to be welcomed and to have a place to belong – free of fear.” And Jason Metrokin, an Alaska Native of Aleut and Alutiq descent, reminds us, “None of us should lose sight of the fact that about 98 percent of citizens are here because past, progressive immigration policies permitted them to come to the United States to make a new home. Immigrants have always recharged our country and have been reliable sources of economic growth, cultural diversity and innovation. And right now we need more of all three.”

Inspired by the words of our First Alaskans, and deeply committed to an inclusive state and nation, we join today to express our hope that the bipartisan comprehensive immigration reform bill being drafted by our colleagues be brought to the floor of our respective bodies for consideration this session. Like our colleagues drafting the bill, we believe this legislation should secure our border, streamline our legal immigration system and provide a clear and responsible path to citizenship for those already here. We pledge to consider this legislation, when presented, with open minds and open hearts.

Sincerely,


Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator


Mark Begich
United States Senator


Don Young
Congressman for All Alaska