



# ANCSA: A complete or incomplete story of sovereignty

What wasn't focused on as much in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act debates, was what the land ownership would mean for tribal sovereignty and community governance #ANCSA50

MEGHAN SULLIVAN • FEB 22, 2022

*Natasha Singh, Koyukon Athabaskan, dances to the Stevens Village drummers with her youngest son, Isaac, during an inter-tribal meeting. (Photo courtesy of Keri Oberly, 2021)*

**Meghan Sullivan**

[Indian Country Today](#)

Shortly after the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act passed into law in 1971, headlines started appearing in local newspapers that hinted at a growing confusion among Alaska Native communities: "Indian Country hard to define," stated one *Tundra Times* edition. "ANCSA and tribalism?" asked another.

The articles were referring to the new, unusual Indigenous legal landscape that ANCSA had established, and the ambiguity surrounding tribes' jurisdiction going forward.

"Exactly what authority might tribes exercise?" asked one *Tundra Times* op-ed. Many were confused about how this legislation would affect tribal sovereignty in Alaska.

Fifty years later, there are still parts of this question that remain unanswered.

The 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act provided 44 million acres and around \$900 million in exchange for the extinguishment of aboriginal land rights. These assets were divided between 12 Alaska Native regional corporations, and more than 200 Alaska Native village corporations.

After the settlement, Alaska Native corporations owned the traditional lands, while preexisting Alaska Native communities had local governing authority. The governing component wasn't anything new – most had been operating for hundreds of years at that point. However, the late timing of Alaska's statehood meant many communities were left out of the nation's earlier tribal legislation. In 1994, their governing recognition was further solidified through the Federally Recognized Indian Tribe List Act. More than 200 Alaska Native villages were now federally recognized tribes, giving them a government-to-government relationship with the United States in addition to their existing local authority, similar to tribes in the Lower 48.

In 1935, southeast Alaska's various Tlingit and Haida communities had been able to receive this federal tribal recognition due to a pre-ANCSA land dispute regarding the Tongass National Forest. Their communities were officially considered one overarching tribe, instead of various smaller tribes tied to villages. This earlier acknowledgement and unified organization set the stage for a strong emphasis on tribal sovereignty throughout the southeast.

But the similarities between federal Indian policy in Alaska and the rest of the U.S. ended there. In the Lower 48, federally recognized tribes have jurisdiction over the lands they oversee, which are known as "trust lands." In these locations, tribal governments usually have full management over their justice system, resources, land use provisions, and hunting and fishing rights. Trust lands can't be bought or sold, and are technically held by the federal government.

ANCSA lands, however, are privately owned, not kept in trust – meaning they don't carry any of the typical legal powers that exist in Indian Country. In a corporate sense, these lands are still owned by Alaska Natives, seeing as they are the shareholders in the companies that hold title to the land. The main difference is they aren't managed by tribal governments.

"So you separate the people and the tribal governments from the land. And now any profit made from our lands is given out to the individuals, rather than the tribal government for services," said Natasha Singh, Koyukon Athabascan, formally the legal counsel for Tanana Chiefs Conference, the non-profit tribal consortium that provides social services for the 42 Alaska Native villages in Interior Alaska. "And so the tribes have no way to provide revenue to build their government."

In a way, it's almost like a fractured governance set up. Tribes provide government services locally, Alaska Native corporations generate most of the community's capital and, as a result, their political sway, and then Alaska Native non-profits look to fill remaining gaps. For instance, the Tanana Chiefs Conference provides social services and healthcare for Interior Alaskan tribes.

Under the Indian Organization Act of 1934, tribes in the Lower 48 could also [create corporations](#). Congress wanted to "permit Indian tribes to equip themselves with the devices of modern business organization, through forming themselves into corporations."

Over the years, the confusion about these various entities has shown up in interesting ways. For example, it's likely part of the reason some people hold Alaska Native corporations solely responsible for the overall well-being of the Alaska Native population.

In the early 80s, journalist Bill Hess described a group of non-Native Alaskan citizens that angrily accosted the corporations for failing to fix misunderstood social issues, such as addiction. In their complaints, they completely overlooked the role of the state government, tribal councils, and local non-profits.

At the same time, Hess noticed that some Alaska Native shareholders looked to the corporations for governmental-type services themselves. It's true that ANCSA legislation tasks the corporations to provide for the social, economic, and cultural well being of Alaska Native shareholders – a role that most other U.S. corporations are not expected to take on.

As a result, the corporations provide certain programs that fit the quasi-government description, such as funeral services, pandemic relief aid, education funding, and cultural programming. Despite this, Hess noted there were some government functions that corporations would never be able to provide, including the ability to “levy taxes, establish courts, make laws, or enforce Indian child welfare regulations.”

The crowded landscape of Alaska Native organizations has also led to enrollment complications. With the possibility for registration in the BIA, village corporations, regional corporations, tribal consortiums, and tribal governments, it can sometimes be easy to mistake enrollment in one entity for enrollment in another.

“(It’s) unfortunately all too common” for someone to “mistake themselves as enrolled in a federally recognized tribe,” states the Tanana Chiefs Conference website, referring to past incidents they’ve seen.

It can certainly be confusing. For one, the enrollment process is similar across most of these organizations. Then there is the fact that some village corporations have almost identical names to their corresponding tribal councils – such as Tanacross, Inc and the Native Village of Tanacross. Additionally, some Alaskan tribes aren’t always colloquially referred to as “tribes.” Names range from Native council, tribal council and Indian Reorganization Act council, to village council and traditional council, according to University of Alaska Fairbanks research.

The ambiguity around tribal enrollment might be part of the reason that some of the younger generations have encountered uncertainty about Alaska Native identity.

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“We’ll ask some of our younger generation, ‘What tribe are you from?’ or they’ll have to include that information on a form, and they’ll say ‘Oh, I’m Doyon, or I’m Sealaska,’” said Charlene Stern, Gwich’in, who is Vice Chancellor for Rural, Community and Native Education at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and Vice President of Tanana Chiefs Conference. “They’re not even clear in their own minds that tribal membership is something different than corporation membership.”

These cases are symptoms of a larger problem: throughout the state, many people aren't aware that Alaska Native tribes exist at all.

"We've been working with the state legislature on a sovereignty initiative. Most of them grew up in Alaska, but they were never even taught that tribes exist," Singh said. "We have to tell them this was done purposefully – there is a reason you don't know."

While people are generally aware of the state's various Alaska Native cultures, communities, and organizations, there isn't as much awareness about specific tribes and their legal distinctions.

The emphasis away from tribes seems to be due to a mixture of intentional policies and unplanned occurrences that have unfolded over the years.

Leading up to ANCSA, the focus had mostly been on the land component of the settlement – Alaska Natives were, after all, on the verge of losing every acre of their land. It was the factor that united hundreds of communities across thousands of miles. What wasn't focused on as much in the settlement debates, was what the land ownership would mean for tribal sovereignty and community governance.

Likewise, in the years after the act, many Alaska Native leaders were focused on the multi-million dollar corporations that had become a part of their community overnight. Around the same time, village leadership began voicing concerns about ANCSA's impact on subsistence and local governance. A more concrete tribal sovereignty movement began to form.

"I'd rather have my hunting and fishing rights," testified Franklin James, Jr, during the 1983 Alaska Native Review Commission, explaining that he hadn't seen many of the legislation's economic benefits in his village, but had often felt affected by the lack of subsistence protections.

Many Alaska Natives viewed ANCSA as a mechanism of self determination. Tribal sovereignty laws weren't as protected as they are now, and over involvement by the BIA often prevented community solutions from taking root. Of the settlement options that had a chance at succeeding, they favored a solution that would allow them to make full decisions over their lands.

"it's an idea that at least allowed us the freedom we wanted to have. And a lot of good outcomes have come from it," said Roy Huhndorf, Yup'ik, an Alaska Native leader during the land claims movement who was one of the initial presidents of Cook Inlet Region, Inc, an Alaska Native regional corporation."But of course, we always knew there was the tribal question. We're missing about two elements of being a tribal government."

Others view ANCSA as an extension of that era's tribal termination policy – disguised under a different name, but still an intentional choice by the U.S. government to phase out tribes and their unique political status.

"I think Congress was trying to get away from tribes and bolstering tribal sovereignty," Singh said. "Only Federal Indian Law doesn't work like that. Congress has to explicitly terminate tribes, or any tribal rights for them to go away – and ANCSA did not do that."

Whether one considers the legislation an act of self determination or one of attempted termination, the legislation's ambiguity around tribes is there. In fact, ANCSA didn't mention tribes at all. The omission has led to a sort of limbo, in which Alaskan tribes are still fully in existence, but are often at risk of losing some of their tribal legal rights. Over the years, many of the Interior Alaskan villages like Singh's community, Stevens Village, have been left to fight additional infringements on their jurisdiction.

"The complete story of sovereignty has yet to be told," wrote Frank Kreim for the *Tundra Times*. "And one of the most important chapters remains to be told in Alaska."

### **'Don't tie our hands'**

In a small Interior Alaskan village, a domestic abuse incident left a woman badly injured and afraid for her life. The community didn't have any law enforcement, so they called in first responders from the closest regional hub and braced for the several hours it usually took for help to arrive.

It ended up being three weeks before state troopers were able to make it to the village. A month of difficult weather had prevented anyone from flying in or out of the area, leaving the woman stranded in a community that didn't have the legal jurisdiction to press charges against the perpetrator. For three weeks, the abuser roamed freely, while locals did what they could to protect the woman from further harm.

These situations fuel the drive for increased governmental authority in Alaska Native villages.

"Don't tie our hands," said Michelle Demmert, Tlingit, policy director of the Alaska Native Women's Resource Center, after recounting the anecdote in a Senate Indian Affairs hearing. "We have beautiful communities with beautiful traditions that deserve better."

When Alaska Native villages talk about strengthening sovereignty, they aren't looking to do so for symbolic authority, but the ability to take real action and prevent very real, heartbreaking dynamics from occurring in their communities.

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One main area this applies to is public safety.

"I think public safety is the huge, unexpected consequence of ANCSA," Singh said. "Everyone thought that the State of Alaska would be able to take care of it. But we're still suffering from a public safety crisis today."

The numbers are stark.



Alaska Native women suffer the highest rates of domestic abuse and sexual violence in the country by 250 percent, according to research conducted by the Indian Law and Order Commission – including when compared to other Native populations in the Lower 48. The research also found that Alaska Natives account for the survivors in 47% of the state's reported sexual assault cases, even though they only make up around 19% of Alaska's population.

This is partly due to the lack of public safety infrastructure in rural Alaska, where most tribal communities are located. Nearly 40 percent of Alaska Native villages lack full-time law enforcement. Many aren't connected to roads, and can only be reached by plane – making outside help highly dependent on weather conditions in regions known for their unpredictable elements.

Intense blizzards, unexpected wind storms, and poor visibility can prevent officials from reaching communities for days.

"Our children are often our first responders, and our tribal leaders and advocates act as law enforcement and preserve crime scenes," Demmert explained in her testimony. "In many communities, women self-organize to provide informal safe houses for women in danger from domestic violence."

Local community members are informally taking on law enforcement responsibilities to combat crime trends. But without the necessary resources, infrastructure, or legal abilities, they are often powerless to create real change.

Like many aspects of ANCSA and Alaska Native life, one topic is connected to several others – land laws impacting sovereignty, sovereignty impacting culture, culture impacting health and wellness.

"The violence is to a point that it's just generations of grief and grief and grief," Singh said. "So it's also hurting our people in terms of being able to retain our culture."

A better equipped tribal government could lead to increased safety in villages, which could enable more tribal citizens and descendants to live in their original communities, close to their traditions and ancestral lands.

"This can attract their tribal members back to the village, to make it a place that our people continue to want to live in, and to make life better for those that are living there currently," she said.

Additional resources would also allow more Alaska Native tribes to modernize their descendant enrollment and governing procedures, like many Alaska Native corporations have done. This could increase the involvement of Alaska Natives who weren't raised in their family's original village, or who have since moved away. All villages might not be interested in making these changes. But for those that are, it could be an additional way to encourage participation for younger generations, and create a clearer distinction between corporate and tribal enrollment.

### **Sovereignty 'as American as Apple Pie'**

There can often be misunderstandings around the term sovereignty, and even the word tribes. At its heart, sovereignty refers to the ability for a community to take care of its own.

“What we’re asking for is the respect that we have the ability to manage our own affairs,” testified Sheldon Katchetag, Inupiaq, former president of the United Tribes of Alaska in 1984.

Those unfamiliar with the term might associate it with outdated education and media coverage, which often depict Native communities in their 18th century form, according to research by IllumiNative, a Native-led non-profit. Although many Native councils can trace their governing roots back hundreds of years, they are undoubtedly modern and in line with current legal standards.

To compare, it would be as if in 2022, the only depiction one saw of the current U.S. federal government was from the country’s early days following the Revolutionary War. While certain values and ideals from that era might still be reflected in modern governance, the systems, procedures, and implementation have evolved with the times, just like they have for tribal governments.

Others might view it as something foreign, or even consider it a process at odds with the American justice system. But sovereignty is nothing new to the country. It’s a tried and tested concept that’s been working for hundreds of years.

“Native sovereignty, the idea of Native self-government within the nation-state, is an American idea, developed by Chief justice John Marshall in the 19th century,” wrote Thomas Berger in his 1985 report on ANCSA’s impacts . “It is as American as apple pie.”

In fact, the concept is something all U.S. citizens have likely come across in their lifetime. While there are certain overarching laws within the country, individual states modify their laws to accommodate different needs in their communities. Florida is going to have different characteristics than North Dakota. It’s the same dynamic for tribal councils.

“A speed limit is a speed limit whether on the Navajo Nation or in upstate New York. Domestic violence and elder abuse are the same no matter where you are,” said Jenny Bell-Jones, a professor at the University of Alaska Fairbanks’ Department of Alaska Native Studies and Rural Development, during a lands hearing. “We all visit different jurisdictions in our lives and manage quite well by using common sense.”

When those outside of the community do talk about tribes, it’s often related to their standing with Alaska Native corporations or the State of Alaska. This can lead to another inaccurate, oversimplified narrative: that Alaska Native tribes are incompatible with Alaska Native corporations. You can sometimes see the belief in reporting and local conversations – tribes versus corporations, one or the other.

There have definitely been tensions between the two at times. Alaska Native tribes and corporations can end up on the opposite sides of community issues, particularly around resource development and land decisions. It’s a central part of the ANCSA conversation, and ICT will be publishing a separate article on the topic in the final installment of the series.

But this narrative overlooks a few key factors.

For one, Alaskan Native tribes and Alaska Native corporations consist of and serve the same people. This includes their leadership as well – a corporate executive is often a tribal citizen, and a tribal council person is usually a shareholder.

This point is consistently emphasized across past articles and in current speeches.

“We are still one people,” read a *Tundra Times* headline from the 70s.

“It is critical to remember this fact: Alaska Natives are both shareholders and tribal members. As such they have everything to lose if they fracture, and everything to gain from unity,” stated a 1993 *Tundra Times* letter to the editor.

Of course, unity is sometimes easier said than done. From an institutional perspective, there are some issues that can complicate coordination.

“The relationship between the two works better in some areas and less so in others,” Stern said. “But I do think that those inherent tensions exist, and will likely always exist, unless some structural changes happen.”

But from a legal perspective, there doesn’t have to be a choice between the two. Bolstering sovereignty takes nothing away from the corporation’s ability to conduct business, in a literal sense.

As is the case in any community, there are some who believe the answer lies solely in one end of the spectrum – either full tribal, or full corporate. But many would simply like to see more cooperation between the entities.

“They are both tools in the tool box, and we need to use every tool available to us,” is a commonly echoed statement in the discussion of corporations and tribes.

Overtime, the call for increased collaboration has become louder. This includes a rise in programs focused on this issue, such as being Good Relatives.

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“We never come in as a people to brainstorm together and ask: what is our plan for our people? What is our ultimate goal we want together? and then approach it in that regard,” Singh said.

Although there may be obstacles, Singh believes there shouldn’t be an excuse for a lack of cooperation between Alaska Native corporations and tribes.

“In order to make the entities work better for us, we have to plan together. It’s not enough to always agree to disagree,” she added. “We need to have these tough conversations.”

Questions at hand relate to profit, development, and means of distributing money.



In addition to dividends, Alaska Native corporations have been able to fund several social initiatives for shareholders — including scholarships, heritage centers, and funeral services.

But people like Singh and Stern point out how most of these financial benefits are centered on individuals, rather than the community as a whole.

This doesn't necessarily mean they are against all individual programs, such as educational scholarships. They're just wondering what an increased focus on community benefits could lead to.

One suggestion is to add more initiatives that go directly to the rural communities in the region. Perhaps Alaska Native corporations could also set aside part of their revenue for strengthening village infrastructure and tribal governments. In return, villages would have to agree to meet certain criteria and be transparent about expenditures.

"We haven't been able to think outside of (profit). Maybe that's one element, but the other element is wellness for our people," Singh said. "What does that look like? We have to put all of our brightest minds together to come up with one or two new tools that we could use, otherwise our rights will just keep dwindling."

It's a question that will have to be answered in the following years — but younger Alaska Natives seem up to the task.

"The younger generation is Native in this new, modern way. There's so many more tribal members and shareholders that are involved in the discussion, getting both a traditional education and Western education," she said. "And I think they're really going to come up with these different ideas for the (Alaska Native corporations) and the tribes."

ICT's ANCSA 50 profile series demonstrated a possible generational trend, too. In their responses, many young Alaska Natives were excited to both promote tribal sovereignty and corporate strength, as well as cooperation between the two entities.

"The pioneers of ANCSA... helped shape the revolutionary system of federal Indian policy that we still rely upon today," said Samuel Hiratsuka, Aleut and Navajo. "It will continue to be important for Alaska Native corporations to work with tribes."

Others acknowledged benefits of the past 50 years, while pausing to consider new approaches today.

"We have great respect and appreciation for the leaders that have come before us and allowed us to stand on their shoulders to get to where we are today as Alaska Native people," said Alannah Hurley, Inupiaq. "We now must be brave enough to truly ask ourselves: is what we're doing working well? Are these systems and institutions serving us collectively as Alaska Native people and do they reflect our traditional values?"

### **Solutions going forward or 'future generations deserve better'**

In addition to the community work of increased tribal and corporate collaboration, there are a few outside avenues that could bolster tribal sovereignty as well.

The first approach is to simply cement the jurisdiction that already exists. This fall, the Alaskans for a Better Government organization launched a campaign for a ballot initiative that would require the state government to officially acknowledge Alaska's 229 federally recognized tribes. In mid-January, organizers submitted 56,200 signatures in support of the measure – nearly double the amount needed to qualify it for November's statewide ballot.

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The measure isn't proposing anything new, and wouldn't be modifying laws. Rather, the sponsors hope it will clarify tribes' existing rights, in an effort to avoid the usual mechanism for doing so – costly legal court cases.

In the past, officials have attempted to clarify ambiguity through legal action. But court cases haven't settled much – many of the same legal disputes end up back in court, perhaps in a different community or generation, but focused on the same issue. It shows in the statistics: the State of Alaska has sued its tribes more than any other state in the country, according to a study conducted by former Governor Walker's administration.

"Our Tribal citizens, our Native peoples, all Alaskans, and our future generations deserve better, and we believe this initiative will lead to a better government for all Alaskans," stated an Alaskans for a Better Government press release.

The court cases are costly for both the tribal and state governments, and often delay tribes' ability to provide critical services to their people. Organizers hope that formal recognition by the state might remove some of these roadblocks, and allow tribes to further streamline their service delivery. The initiative aims to build upon this record by promoting collaboration between the state government and the state's tribal councils, ideally leading to a better run state overall.

The organizers also view it as a chance to move the conversation into Alaska's mainstream, creating more awareness of tribal sovereignty throughout the state's general population. This would give other non-Indigenous Alaskans an opportunity to weigh in on the issue, which for many years has mostly been shaped in courtrooms and discussed in the communities it directly impacts.

"This is a critical step, as many Alaskans do not have a basic understanding of the distinct political rights of our Indigenous governments," said an Alaskans for a Better Government press release.

So far, the measure has been endorsed by a wide range of Alaska Native entities, including several Alaska Native corporations, the Alaska Federation of Natives, and a handful of tribal councils. It's an example of the type of sovereignty policy that is supported across the board.

The second option is to move some of the Alaska Native community's privately-owned lands into trust, which would grant the councils in these areas' additional authority.

Village corporations and regional corporations aren't the only Alaska Native organizations that own lands in private title. Many villages do as well — either through townships, Native allotments, or corporate land transfers. These villages would be able to start the trust application process immediately, if they were interested in that approach.

"Hopefully moving forward, more tribes will have the opportunity to petition to get land put into trust, because with that comes a lot more control over jurisdiction, public safety, enforcement — things that are generally a given for tribes in the Lower 48," Stern said.

Lands owned by the corporations can also be sold to tribes or village municipalities.

Corporate to tribal land transfers have occurred in the past, but it's not always done with the ultimate goal of moving those lands into trust. Some favor this approach due to land loss fears, resource development disagreements or village infrastructure needs. However, moving Alaska Native corporation lands to villages doesn't automatically grant the additional sovereignty powers seen in trust lands. If this was one's goal, they would have to submit an application with the BIA first. There isn't a guaranteed timeline for this process, and some applications have ended up stalled for years. In 2021, the Interior Department estimated that there were over 1,000 pending applications presented by tribes.

The lengthy legal procedure can also generate high costs. A petition for only a dozen acres of trust lands can end up costing six figures, according to an Interior Department spokesperson.

"Tribes in Alaska have pushed to keep trust land as a potential if they ever need that very specific tool," Singh said. "Federal oversight is good for keeping the land safe. But it's not good for everything."

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Many of Alaska's smaller tribes don't have the budget for the application process, she explained. The funds that would need to be allocated for lawyer fees are usually put towards other causes that are a higher priority in the community, such as infrastructure.

The uncertainty and complicated bureaucratic hoops are why some avoid the trust land option. Critics also say it can make tribal oversight dependent on the politics of the president's administration.

Either way, it wouldn't have to be an all or nothing approach — each of the state's 200+ Alaska Native communities could decide for themselves if the process fit their goals. There are also trust land advocates who would still like to keep some ANCSA lands open for economic options, while moving other areas into trust. In the past, the approach has worked well for villages that have focused on smaller amounts of lands, such as the regions directly near their community, or areas that hold additional cultural significance.

"Nobody is suggesting that ANCSA corporations will be required to convey their land to tribes," Bell said. "(It) is something for the shareholders and their corporation to decide."

A more expedient approach, says Singh, is to apply what she terms "sovereignty clouds" — designated areas where the land isn't in trust, but tribes are granted additional governing authorities. This would be especially impactful for pressing matters of public safety.

Programs like this are already starting to take off. Sen. Lisa Murkowski recently authored a pilot program that would give 30 Alaskan tribes the ability to prosecute anyone who commits domestic abuse crimes against their tribal citizens. If the pilot works well, there may be potential for future "sovereignty clouds" down the line.

The concept has been applied before by Rep. Don Young, in a previous amendment to the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act. Over the years, the idea has received bipartisan support, with Rep. Young arguing that Alaska's unique jurisdictional situation shouldn't be viewed as a partisan issue. In mid February, an updated version of this legislation was introduced.

"The remoteness and isolation of Native villages — most of which are not connected to the road system and only accessible by air — makes it difficult to prevent violence and care for the survivors," said Rep. Don Young in a 2019 speech about the policy. "Villages need to be empowered to develop local solutions to these problems."

Finally, smaller tribes could look to consolidate. This approach could allow them to pool their resources for government functions, and have a larger legal capacity. This method is especially relevant in places like Interior Alaska, where villages are often smaller in population and more spread out. Four neighboring villages might consist of the same cultural group but be registered as four different federally recognized tribes, each with populations of under 200. Lower 48 tribes in similar situations have successfully grouped together in the past, such as the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara.

Perspectives and needs related to tribal and corporate dynamics vary by community. But whatever an individual Alaska Native community's specific situation might be, there are a range of options available for addressing sovereignty gaps in ANCSA.

The conversation around sovereignty has evolved since ANCSA became law, but it's never gone away. In 1985, John Borbridge Jr, Tlingit, gave a speech to the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska on the topic, after a local attorney had expressed frustration that people were still talking about land rights and tribal sovereignty even after ANCSA had been settled.

"For each of us who was born (Alaska Native)...Whatever happens to our tribal land is our individual and collective lifetime concern," responded Borbridge to his colleague's complaint. "Our responsibility for our tribal lands, our tribal government, and our tribal sovereignty are not of recent origin. They became a part of our lifetime agenda upon birth."

Borbridge was one of the founding fathers of ANCSA, and had fought tirelessly to get the legislation through Congress. But throughout that time and in the years after, he constantly reminded people that it wasn't intended to be a perfect law, that there were several successful outcomes but there were also flaws related to sovereignty and land, and that it was important to focus on future methods for fixing the remaining problems.

Singh echoes this same line of thought today.

"We're still here. We're still Native. And in many ways, we're doing great," Singh said. "We can still celebrate ANCSA, while criticizing it at the same time."

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