

Submitted by Stanley Pete

Proposal 94

I am the author of Proposal 94.

The native people have embraced new religions that were imposed on them, and at the same time have tried to hold onto their own.

The Freedom to act on one's religious beliefs is protected by the government. But that protection may be overcome by compelling state interests. A state law can pressure, remove, or influence the believer not to practice an act because of fear of imprisonment or penalties. We are not criminals.

It has been recognized that early colonizers regarded the beliefs of native people were unimportant, shallow and not meaningful. Native Alaskans religions vary along the Yukon; beliefs and rituals and rules are different. There are many different rules and taboos regarding salmon that are present to avoid offending the salmon, but more importantly, the creator.

The importance of harvesting the first king salmon returning holds a great position of honor and respect. There are many First Salmon Ceremonies that celebrate to show determination, renewal, prosperity and, most importantly, honor the creator. These are usually private gatherings. There are fish dances and songs that honor king salmon. King salmon is a staple food; king salmon has a role in the peoples well being and king salmon even has medicinal value.

I know that the first king salmon is very important to the people that live along the Yukon River and its tributaries. The first king salmon plays an important role in all Yukon native religious and traditional celebrations. Therefore, I am agreeable to the amendment that would include the entire Yukon River drainage in Alaska in this proposal for the protection of all our religious beliefs.