

# First Alaskans Institute

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## FIRST ALASKANS INSTITUTE MOURNS LOSS OF SENATOR ALBERT M. KOOKESH

Dgheyey Kaq', Dena'inaq e'nen'aq' qilan (Anchorage, Alaska, lands of the Dena'ina) – First Alaskans Institute (FAI) Board of Trustees and Staff are deeply saddened by the passing of our Trustee, Senator Albert M. Kookesh (Tlingit), who walked into the forest today surrounded by his loving family in his beloved community of Angoon. His Tlingit names were Ka'sháan and Yikdehhein, and he was Teikweidí (Eagle Brown Bear) and was the child of the L'eeneidí (Dog Salmon).

Ka'sháan dedicated his lifetime of service to his community and peoples. He proudly lived in Angoon where he and his wife, Sally, raised their family, and numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Together they owned and operated the Kootznahoo Inlet Lodge.

"Al was a powerful voice for the Tlingit people and Alaska Natives. His work and dedication will not be forgotten. We wish his family well in this time of grief," said Willie "Iggiagruk" Hensley (Inupiaq), Chairman of First Alaskans. Ka'sháan has left a great legacy within FAI having served as a Trustee since 2000. As a Senator, he hosted multiple FAI Public Policy Fellows during legislative sessions, and always mentored our other fellows and interns. Last fall, he testified at FAI's Protecting Our Ways of Life Tribunal where he shared stories of systemic harm to the abundance of our homelands, the erosion of our wellbeing and governance, and criminalization of our peoples. He cared deeply about protecting our Alaska Native ways of life, advocated for it throughout the entirety of his life, was taken to state court over it, and was the victor in those courts for his stance and action to ensure we can continue to live our ways of life.



Albert and Sally Kookesh in Angoon. Photo by Sylvia Lange.

*"I didn't do it to break the law. I didn't do it to offend anybody. I did it to challenge that premise, 15 fish per family per year...that is one and a half fish a month, or less...Let me see any of you try and live the life of a whole salmon season, a whole winter on 15 fish. Especially if you have a family of ten or five...I wanted to challenge that forever...The progress of an Alaska Native in Alaska can be measured by our success in the courts. Nobody ever gave us anything. We had to sue for it...I hope you can understand as to why I challenged it. I thought that wasn't fair. I thought it was not right. I feel, being a senator and former representative of the house, that laws are going to continue to evolve in Alaska. Everything you all do, everything we all do collectively is going to help get us to a place where we want to be eventually, especially when it comes to our salmon. So, these kinds of cases aren't mean cases, they are trying to develop the law to where it should be."*

*- Ka'sháan Albert Kookesh, Salmon and Society Meeting, Anchorage, Alaska, USA, 2016*

Our hearts are with Sally and Ka'sháan's beautiful family and community. Gunalchéesh for sharing him with us all - Alaska is stronger for all his advocacy and his fire for our peoples. Our lives will continue to be enriched by his great humor and inspired by his passion for the advancement of our Native peoples in perpetuity. "We wrap his family, his clan, and his community in a warm blanket of gratitude and love for his life and leadership," said La quen náay Liz Medicine Crow (Haida/Tlingit), President/CEO of First Alaskans.

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**About First Alaskans Institute (FAI):** At FAI we know we are responsible for carrying more than 10,000 years of ancestral knowledge into the future with rigor, humor, resilience, vigilance, and love. To learn more visit our website at [www.firstalaskans.org](http://www.firstalaskans.org), contact us at 907-677-1700 or email [info@firstalaskans.org](mailto:info@firstalaskans.org).