

First Alaskans Institute

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FIRST ALASKANS INSTITUTE URGES A NO VOTE ON BALLOT MEASURE NO. 1 – THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION QUESTION

Dgheyey Kaq'; Dena'inaq ełnen'aq' qilan (Anchorage, Alaska; lands of the Dena'ina) – First Alaskans Institute (FAI), a statewide Alaska Native advocacy nonprofit, takes a rare position to encourage Alaskan voters to vote no on the Constitutional Convention ballot measure. Alaska's constitution requires that the question of a constitutional convention be put before voters every 10 years following the decennial census. FAI has stepped forward like many other Native organizations to oppose the constitutional convention because the timing of this issue in this divisive climate in Alaska does not bode well for our Alaska Native peoples. A constitutional convention would have far-reaching negative impacts on Alaska Native communities today and into the future, further putting our inherent rights which are already in tension in this state in jeopardy. FAI urges all Alaskans to vote no on Ballot Measure no. 1 - the Constitutional Convention measure.

“At this time, a constitutional convention could severely harm our Native peoples and communities for generations to come, as well as all Alaskans. It is no secret that Alaska has become fractured by down south partisan politics, and racial tensions continue to restrict our ability to create the equitable processes a constitutional convention would require. Given this, we risk deepening divides and inviting even more out of state control over Alaska,” says La quen náay Liz Medicine Crow (Haida/Lingít), President/CEO, FAI.

To engage in this now would subject our Native peoples to even further injustice and inequity under the state constitution. Alaskans who truly love this place know that having strong and equitable relationships with Alaska Natives is imperative to moving this state forward. We have work to do as a community before we can hope that a constitutional convention would actually serve Alaska well. Quite frankly, we are not yet there.

Here are a few things Alaskans need to understand about this constitutional convention process. First, a constitutional convention is not an amendment process – it opens the entire constitution to widespread change. As part of this process, delegates to the constitutional convention have to be elected. There is a strong likelihood in this political climate that delegates to the constitution would include many anti-tribal and anti-Alaska Native interests.

Opening the constitution to broad rewrites in this climate could negatively affect Alaska Native communities and exacerbate issues we already experience at a disproportionate rate. Currently, the Alaska Constitution enshrines support for public education, public health, public welfare, and Alaska's university system, and it also protects individual liberties.

Anti-Alaska Native interests could attempt to use the constitutional convention as an opportunity to roll back protected private rights and necessary public services, further partisanship in redistricting, suppress voting rights, attempt to attack Native rights, threaten the Indian Child Welfare Act's application in Alaska, diminish our ANCSA corporations who are incorporated under state law, do away

with rural public education funding, eliminate vital power cost equalization and the Alaska Marine Highway System, rollback recognition of Indigenous languages and Alaska Native Tribes, and so much more. There is also a strong chance that delegates may attempt to alter Alaska's fish and game management system in such a way that further disadvantages Alaska Native ways of life.

“A constitutional convention will cost our state tens of millions of dollars, could take years to finalize, and would throw the state into an era of uncertainty that would further harm our economy, our communities, and our future. We simply cannot stand by and let this happen without asking our community and all others who call Alaska home to vote no on this ballot measure. First Alaskans doesn't just oppose this, we also come with a solution. Work with us to evolve and transform Alaska into a place that honors its Native peoples and all those who now call Alaska home in an equitable and systemic way, and then together let us see what may be possible,” says 'Wáahlaal Gíidaak Barbara Blake (Haida/Lingít/Ahtna), Director, Alaska Native Policy Center (ANPC), FAI.

FAI remains committed to ensuring progress for the next 10,000 years for the Alaska Native communities who have always called this place home. We will continue to advocate for the health and wellbeing of our communities and the right of our future generations to know, live and love who they are. For these reasons, we urge the public to oppose a constitutional convention. “As Alaska Natives we intimately understand our responsibility to those who will come after us. We should not force future Alaskans to pay the price for our political tensions today,” says Qunmiġu Kacey Hopson (Iñupiaq), Indigenous & Governmental Affairs Manager, ANPC, FAI.

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At First Alaskans Institute, 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, please visit www.firstalaskans.org, or contact us at info@firstalaskans.org.