

Governor off-base with Gwich'in comments

WebPosted Dec 2 2003 04:43 PM CST

WHITEHORSE - The governor of Alaska impressed many people in the Yukon with his message of optimism on Monday. But others were less impressed with comments he made about Gwich'in people.

- FROM DEC. 2, 2003 : Murkowski leaves optimistic message

The head of the Council of Yukon First Nations says Governor Frank Murkowski is off-base when it comes to the Gwich'in people. Murkowski suggested Gwich'in citizens would support drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, if they knew the truth about oil development.

He told a Whitehorse audience on Monday the Gwich'in have been led astray.

"I would encourage the Gwich'in (people) to visit the area," he said. "Particularly to see the benefits that the Prudhoe Bay developments provided the Eskimo people of the Barrow, and other areas."

Murkowski says environmentalists have used their influence to make sure Gwich'in people don't visit the area.

Those comments didn't sit well with CYFN Grand Chief Ed Schultz, who was in the audience.

Schultz says Gwich'in people have toured Prudhoe Bay. They have seen for themselves the good, and the bad, of oil drilling.

"Certainly I don't support the comments that First Nations people are being led around by anybody," Schultz said. "I think that we are in the 21st century and you can certainly see that First Nations people in North America are quite advanced politically and otherwise."

Drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is just about the only major issue Yukon and Alaska don't agree on.

The refuge is home to the calving grounds of the Porcupine Caribou Herd.

Premier Dennis Fentie says he supports the Gwich'in in their opposition to oil exploration there, and Governor Murkowski is one of America's biggest lobbyists for development in the refuge.



CYFN Grand Chief Ed Schultz says Murkowski is wrong

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