



**Paper: Anchorage Daily News (AK)**  
**Title: AFN looks to world for development ideas -**  
**QUALITY OF LIFE: Forum features ways to boost rural economy.**  
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Native leaders are drawing on the experience of international business experts to bring rural Alaska into the global economy.

The effort pivots on a forum that began Thursday in Anchorage and continues today.

On Thursday, prominent speakers included world-renowned economist Hernando DeSoto of Peru, venture capitalists, a top-level director from Wal-Mart, plus a prominent mix of politicians, chief executives and influential state and federal bureaucrats.

The Leadership Forum, sponsored by the Alaska Federation of Natives, is part brainstorming session, part networking event, organizers said.

By bringing Outside ideas to Alaska, AFN hopes to spark innovation that encourages investment and creates jobs throughout Alaska without forsaking cultural traditions like subsistence-based lifestyles, said Julie Kitka, AFN president.

"The whole concept of shared prosperity and not leaving any corner of Alaska behind is very important to us," she said.

In several break-out panels, more than 300 participants discussed how to make telecommunication services like high-speed Web available everywhere in rural Alaska, Kitka said.

Other important topics include lowering the cost of energy in the Bush, providing job training and education for a bubble of young Natives entering the economy, and possibly creating a free-trade zone such as the one in Dubai, a member of the United Arab Emirates.

The unprecedented Dubai Outsource Zone, as it's called, eliminates taxes to encourage global outsourcing companies to move to the region, according to its Web site.

AFN will pursue state and federal legislation to make the best ideas reality, Kitka said.

Compared to urban Alaska, village residents enjoy fewer jobs, less educational opportunities, lower incomes and higher reliance on state and federal assistance, studies have shown.

The chasm is growing, said AFN co-chair Tim Towarak.

High energy prices have forced many people to flee the Bush for cheaper living in Anchorage and other cities, he said. The forum may help correct that disparity, he said, by offering job-producing ideas and entrepreneurial incentives.

"It's a learning exchange between rural Alaska and urban businesses," said Towarak, a resident of Unalakleet in Western Alaska and chief executive for Bering Strait Native Corp., the Native regional corporation for the Bering Strait region.

Thirty-five years after the Alaska Native Land Claims Settlement Act was enacted, many Natives are still learning how to tap into the value of the regional and village corporations that federal law created, he said.

A popular panel, scheduled to continue today, will help village corporations and tribal leaders understand the federal 8(a) program that awards Native corporations no-bid government contracts, he said.

The controversial Small Business Administration program has awarded multimillion-dollar contracts to many Native corporations. The program has been under fire because of its success, he said, a recent federal report found the SBA hasn't properly monitored it.

Still, village corporations and Native business owners hope to take advantage of it, he said.

Another helpful seminar, also set for today, will focus on the **Alaska Marketplace**, Towarak said. Created two years ago after the last Leadership Forum, the marketplace is a contest that seeks unique business ideas from the Bush.

Modeled after the World Bank's Development Marketplace, it uses corporate donations to award thousands of dollars in seed money to rural innovators.

Proposals for businesses planning to provide such services as cultural tourism and alternative fuels shared more than \$500,000 in April.

AFN plans to continue the contest, Towarak said.

Keynote speaker DeSoto, a prize-winning economist studying Third World economies, appeared Thursday on a large video screen from Lima, Peru.

He told more than 300 people that rural communities must agree if and how they plan to retain cultural values before growing businesses.

Consensus is critical, he said.

That's the take-home message for Willie Kasayulie, a resident of Akiachak in Southwest Alaska.

A board member of Calista Corp. and AFN's tribal representative, Kasayulie said residents in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta need to agree before economic development can proceed, whether it's developing new mines or providing cheap fuel.

"I intend to carry the message back to the villages," he said.

The forum continues from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. today at the Hotel Captain Cook.

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Caption:

Kitka

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