

RAMSEY CLARK DRAWS DOUBTS

General Counsel, AFN Deemed Inconsistent on Claim Solution Views

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Several prominent observers of the Alaska Land Claims fight in Washington now question whether Ramsey Clark (General Counsel for the Alaska Federation of Natives) and the AFN Board of Directors agree on what would be an equitable land claims settlement.

The amount of land required for an acceptable settlement appears to be the major conflict between the former Attorney General and the AFN.

Clark is reported by more than one prominent Eastern advocate of the Alaskan Native as having been in favor of Senate bill S1830. This bill, which provided for 10 million acres and 500 million dollars passed the Senate last fall.

Observers report that Clark felt S1830 was an excellent set-

tlement, providing some land and a great deal of money.

"It was my feeling that there was not widespread delight in Alaska over the Senate action," commented one friend on the East Coast who is closely connected with the land claims push.

Indeed there was not. A Tundra Times poll last July of Alaskan villagers and Native leaders showed them to be almost overwhelmingly in favor of more

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land in the settlement.

Shortly after, the Washington Post used the Tundra Times article as a basis to measure opinions in Washington. Ramsey Clark appeared closer to Congress, many thought, than the Natives he was hired to represent.

Several Congressmen have cited the claim that any large land settlement would isolate the Native people from the general Alaskan society.

Senator Henry M. Jackson was quoted as calling a large land settlement a "sociological disaster" which would create "huge native enclaves" to block further development of the state.

According to many Alaskans, Ramsey Clark may agree.

According to many who were in Washington for the last Congressional session, Clark lobbied in the House for a bill with the same provisions as S1830. AFN leaders, arriving in Washington in September and October, promptly contradicted this position.

"If you don't want S1830, you'd better get yourself another lawyer," was the reported comment from members of the House Interior Committee.

If, as many believe, Ramsey Clark believes the land is worthless and of questionable sociological value to the Alaska Natives, the AFN may have to seriously consider the impact

of such beliefs on his pressure for a land claims settlement.

If, as may be true, Clark has the same beliefs as many opponents of the AFN position (now calling for 60 million acres, 500 million dollars and a 2 per cent overriding mineral royalty), all his valuable legal expertise and talent may be worthless to this particular client.

A lawyer should represent the wishes of his client. He may advise them if he believes his client will make a mistake, but cannot control major decisions for his client.

Lawyers, reporters, and people closely involved with the AFN fight are beginning to question how closely their law firms represent their interests—not necessarily their "best" interests but the ones they have decided to seek.

One alternative, which has been suggested, is to employ professional lobbyists.

While not as highly regarded as lawyers, they have proved effective for many large corporations and major interests.

Some authorities believe a concerted push by the AFN, its General Counsel and Alaska's Congressional delegation could result in a sizeable land claims settlement—one which might reach 40 million acres or more.

Senators Edward Kennedy and Fred Harris reportedly begin their efforts in the Senate this week to introduce a bill advo-

cating the AFN position.

The administration is also expected to reveal its own position. President Nixon may present a bill which would be more liberal than last year's legislative proposal.

Several sources in Washington do not take very seriously the bill introduced last week by Congressmen Wayne Aspinall and James A. Haley of the House Interior Committee. Congress has yet to hear from the President, the Senate and other Representatives.

The Aspinall bill has been characterized as providing for 40 million acres of "empty rights" by Mr. William Byler of the Association of American Indian Affairs, Inc. in New York.

(Mr. Byler is executive director of this nonprofit private corporation which has supported the interests of American Indians for the past 40 years. Its 50,000 members across the country include such influential executives as Arthur Sulzberger, editor and publisher of the New York Times.)

The Aspinall bill may be part of a power play, an indication of what could come out of the House subcommittee if other interests are not active.

Indeed, last year, the same kind of "exclusive use" provisions were suggested for the Taos Pueblo, who eventually gained trust title to their lands in the Blue Lake area.