

# AFN NOT FOR STATE LAND BILL

## Board Calls for Rural Affairs Group Meeting

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ANCHORAGE, (Special)—Strong opposition to the current house bill for State participation in the land claims settlement was voiced Tuesday by the Board of Directors of the Alaska Federation of Natives.

Meeting in Anchorage, the board adopted a resolution recommending that the current bill be withdrawn from the legislative process and that the governor call a meeting of the Rural Affairs Commission to assist in drafting appropriate legislation to meet the needs of rural Alaska.

The bill referred to was drafted by the legislative council, a bipartisan group, to replace an earlier bill ruled unconstitutional because it appropriated money directly to natives.

The current proposal calls for

an appropriation to the Rural Development Agency of \$15 million or 10 per cent of the federal cash settlement, which ever is greater.

The appropriation would be effective at the time and upon the condition that Congress settles the land claims issue before Jan. 1, 1970.

Members of the board objected to the fact that the funds were tied to the passage of the Congressional land claims bill and suggested that all references to the federal land claims settlement be deleted.

If appropriations are focused on rural areas rather than the natives themselves, because appropriations to natives would be unconstitutional, then the bill should not be tied to federal legislation that would directly

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benefit the natives, one board member said.

The rural areas of Alaska have needs now, another member said, so why not appropriate the money now, whether or not there is a federal land claims settlement.

"We might not get a land claims settlement through Congress by Jan. 1, 1970," Floro Lekanof added.

Another board member, Byron Mallott, stressed, "We do not disapprove the appropriation of that amount of money to solving the problems of rural Alaska, but we do disapprove of the state meeting the needs of rural Alaska under the guise of State participation in the land claims settlement."

A staff attorney of the legislative council was on hand to explain provisions of the bill and to carry back criticisms of the bill to the legislative council.

Following his initial explanation, twenty some board members began discussing the bill point by point and offering their criticisms to it.

However, after reviewing only part of it, with opposition to the bill mounting, Don Wright recommended that the bill be sent to the Rural Affairs Commission.

According to Wright, who is a Commission member, the Commission was created by Hickel, but its nearly forty members did not meet last year and have not yet met this year.

The members are from all over Alaska, he said, most are natives and are familiar with the problems in the rural areas and should be called upon to assist in draft-

ing appropriate legislation.

The Governor, he added, is supposed to call a meeting of the group once a year.

"It seems strange," Mallott said, "that no native people and no people understanding rural Alaska have been consulted in writing the bill."

According to him, the bill is a product of partisan politics that has surrounded State participation in the native land claims settlement.

Under the current proposal, money would be appropriated to the State Rural Development Agency by the State Legislature.

This agency, with the approval of the Legislature, would set up rural development districts in areas with at least 30 residents and no more than 2,000 residents, and a Rural Development Council from each area would be formed.

The council would formulate plans for community improvement projects subject to the approval of the director of the Rural Development Agency, who would be appointed by the Governor, and approved by the Legislature.

The bill, Don Wright charged, is creating a State Bureau of Indian Affairs.

If money is being put up for rural areas, then they should be able to use it as they see fit, he added.

Objections were raised to setting up rural councils in areas where native councils are already operating.

Let the funds be administered on a regional native organization

that knows the problems and have been working on them for a long time, one member said.

Not only natives, but everybody in the area would benefit, he added.

"You're going to set up so many levels of government that we'll never know what the others

are doing," another member said.

Other matters under discussion include the restructuring of the AFN, but no action was taken on this matter by the end of the morning session. Committee reports were also to be given before the meeting adjourned this afternoon.