

FIRST CLAIMS CHECKS ARRIVE

12 Regionals Receiving \$500,000 Checks Apiece

By JACQUELINE GLASGOW

Staff Writer

ANCHORAGE — "It's a beginning — an Alpha and a Genesis." The speaker was Joe Upicksoun of Barrow. The occasion was the payment of the first funds due to the Alaska Natives under the Land Claims Settlement Act. It was a six million dollar beginning.

Twelve checks in the amount of \$500,000 were presented to Native corporations formed under the terms of the act. A presentation ceremony was held at the Anchorage-Westward Hotel Saturday, July 1, a landmark day in the history of the struggle to effect a just settlement.

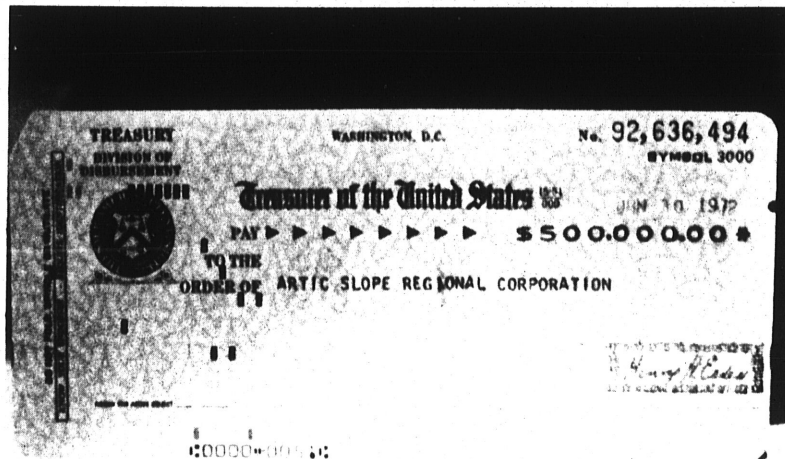
U. S. Senator Ted Stevens arrived from Washington D. C. to present the checks accompanied by Morris Thompson, area director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Alaska.

Flown in on the same plane was a multi-million dollar payload.

Morris Thompson described the transfer of funds as "the first of a number of transactions which showed real faith in a people that stand together and fight together for something they have a right to fight for."

"This part settlement," he said, "is not a settlement for today, tomorrow, or the next day. The land is going to belong

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THE FIRST INSTALLMENT—This is the check Joe Upicksoun received on behalf of the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation. Appropriately, it and the 11 other regional

checks were delivered on the weekend of July 4th, Independence Day.

—Photo by TOM RICHARDS JR.

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to the people forever."

One of the primary uses the money will be put to will be the setting up of land offices to guide the regions and villages in all-important land selections.

It will also be available to research timber and mineral resources, mining possibilities, and organizational costs. For many corporations it will be a continuation of programs already begun in the interim in which there were no federal funds.

John Sackett, President of Tanana Chief's Doyon, Ltd.,

believes the regional corporations have the obligation to set up a complete "managerial information delivery system for the entire corporate structure, a continuing information and education as to the final results of the Land Claims Act and what it means to each individual stockholder.

"There's no reason," he said, "to have a corporation exist at all unless the people know they are participants and ACT as participants."

The regional representatives present at the ceremony evidenced a sense of responsibility and a holding-in-trust obligation to the people of their regions.

Senator Stevens said: "These gentlemen here are businessmen in the fullest sense of the word . . . starting out as heads of corporations which have a substantial base. Each of these representatives," said Stevens, "are receiving the monies on behalf of the residents of their areas."

Stevens spoke out strongly for the AFN. "I am concerned. The AFN may be losing some of the support it has earned. In speaking to you as twelve separate corporations, I also bring you a message for those people who are seeking to divide the Alaskan Natives."

"I was a representative of the TOTAL," he continued. "The central organization of the AFN has served you well. You will be before Congress at least another 10 years (in seeking legislation that implements the Land Claims Bill)."

"I am reminded," said Stevens, "of Benjamin Franklin's flag with the serpent cut in parts: United we stand, divided we fall. I hope the Alaskan

Native will stand together."

Under the terms of the Act, this first payment cannot be used for long-term investments such as stocks and bonds, but may be deposited in a savings account drawing interest. The interest on six million dollars is sizeable even for one day.

As the banks are not open on Saturday, there was some concern as to where the checks could be safely kept over the weekend and more than a little chagrin about the fact that the money would draw no interest for either Saturday or Sunday.

Last minute arrangements were made to have local bankers present at the Anchorage-Westward with the possibility of getting the checks deposited.

Several bankers were on hand but for the most part the regions were not in a hurry to disclose just where they were going to deposit a half-million dollars.

Arctic Slope Corporation, however, announced that they intended to deposit with the Alaska National Bank.

"They have been our friends for a long time," said Upik-soun, "when we were in the red. They believed in us on the come and by golly, we'll deal with them AFTER the come."

Cook Inlet Region, Inc., scooped the other regions, flying to Washington, D. C., on Friday to pick up their check. Saturday they joined their fellow regions in the ceremonies which began at 7:30 p.m.

The nine corporations who received checks at the Anchorage presentation were: Arctic

Slope Native Corporation of Barrow; Nana, Inc., of Kotzebue; Ahitna, Inc., of Copper Center; Bering Straits Native Corporation of Nome; Koniag, Inc., of Kodiak; Aleut Corporation of the Aleutian Islands; Chugach Natives, Inc., of Cordova; and Doyon, Ltd., of Fairbanks; and Sealaska of Juneau.

Calista Corporation of Bethel and the Bristol Bay Native Corporation in Dillingham requested that their checks be presented to them in their own communities over the Fourth of July holiday.

According to Jack Wick, the youngest of the regional corporation presidents (26 years old), Koniag, Inc., the Land Claims Settlement and this first money is the result of "a lot of work and mostly bullheadedness."

The Alaskan Native has learned well the benefits of determination. Now he enters the genesis of the new age, which Joe Upik-soun describes as "the transition from living off the surface of the earth to Western civilization."