

Angapak, AFN Chairman Endorses Watt

Nelson Angapak, AFN Chairman, personally endorsed James Watt for the Secretary of Interior, last week in a prepared statement at the nation's capitol.

Nelson was the only Alaskan to testify at the confirmation hearings in Washington and endorsed the confirmation of Watt personally, but said the AFN board has not met to discuss the nomination.

Nelson received the support from the Committee Chairman James McClure, R-Idaho, who said Congress must live up to the commitments it has made.

Angapak also called on Watt to support increased funding to convey land to Alaska Natives

and carry out the provisions of the native claims settlement act. "It will be one of my highest priorities in the next year to see that your land is conveyed," McClure said to Angapak.

Angapak also requested that Watt exempt from the federal hiring freeze the work on implementing the native land claims settlement act. "Almost a decade ago the Congress enacted the most ambitious transfer of public lands into private ownership in the history of our nation," Angapak said, "but that program is now stalled because of inadequate funding."

Indian groups had been concerned about the nomination

but dropped their objections Thursday when Watt pledged to carry out governments responsibilities to native people.

Kenneth E. Black, of the National Tribal Chairmen's Association was concerned about Watt's involvement with the Mountain States Legal Foundation's case against Indian water rights. Indian groups dropped their objections when Watt pledged to carry out the governments trust responsibilities.

In other testimony, Utah Gov. Scott Matheson, a Democrat and various representatives of various interest groups-including Indian, forestry, oil and gas associations-

testified in favor of Watt.

New Alaska Senator GOP Frank Murkowski attended nearly all of the two-day hearings but had asked few questions. Saying that he did not want to make quick answers based on a quick study, Watt would not be specific on how the Interior department would handle the millions of acres of Alaska's federal lands.

Watt dodged questions from Sen. Murkowski on such issues as competitive leasing in the National Petroleum Reserve on the North Slope and subsistence bowhead whale hunting by Eskimos.

"I will be giving a good bit of attention to Alaska," Watt said. "I look forward to learning about the act (d-2 or ANSCA). Alaska will dominate a lot of my attention in the time ahead."

Watt told Murkowski that he favors consulting local governments before oil and gas lease sales and pledged to work closely with native groups.

Earlier, Watt had met with environmental groups for an exchange of views. After the meeting Watt said the meeting was productive, but declined to give details. The representative

from the Sierra Club, the Colorado Open Space Council and the Audobon Society took no stand against Watt but adopted a wait and see attitude.

At one point in their meeting, Watt told environmentalists that unless energy is developed in an orderly fashion, Eastern political interests would force development in a manner harmful to the West.

Watt said, "We want the right kind of development to come over time, not the wrong kind of development to come in a crisis." He said that the federal government moves in a crisis with the force of a meat ax, not with the precision of a surgeon's scalpel.

Although Watt describes himself as an environmentalist, conservation organizations disagree and oppose his nomination for secretary of the interior.

Alaska Senator Frank Murkowski who took the oath of office on Monday, January 5, praised the selection of Watt and noted that no state deals more with the Interior Department than Alaska.