Senator Gruening Clarifies Stand on Land Freeze . . .

(Continued from Page 1)

I introduced it but I felt and made clear that it was unsatisfactory for a number of reasons. For one thing it wanted to establish the value of lands which would be transferred to native ownership if and when the bill were enacted at 1867 value—the time of purchase of Alaska.

Now since all Alaska was purchased for $7.2 million, or something less than two cents an acre, the amount the natives would secure would be ridiculously small.

The second objection was that once the natives had secured this land they would have little or no control over its management and disposition. All these powers would be reserved to the Secretary of the Interior thus perpetuating the bureaucratic control which in my judgment should not continue to hinder freedom of action of the native people in their utilization of the land which they had received.

Native groups shared my view that this bill was unsatisfactory and prepared another bill which represented their thinking at that time. It provided that the matter would be referred to the Court of Claims and its decision would determine what land the native people were entitled to and under what conditions. I introduced that bill also.

Subsequently the native groups had new ideas about this legislation. They feared that the Court of Claims procedure would take too long and that their case might drag on for years.

So together with the Task Force, which included a wide representation, a third bill was drafted. I introduced that bill also.

While it was being drafted I continued to urge speed because time was passing. The result was the bill when I introduced it was also not in final form. Several last minute changes were made but it represented a much closer approach to a just settlement than previous drafts, although in legislation of this complexity it is understandable that some changes may continued to be made. I had announced that as this bill was received I would move for hearings in Alaska.

In view of the importance and the urgency legislation I felt it should not take the usual course of being referred to the Subcommittee on Indian Affairs of the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs but should instead be referred to the full committee.

The reason for this deviation from the customary practice was twofold. First, it would obviate delay. After hearings before the subcommittee its findings would have to be transferred to the full committee, which would probably have to hold hearings again which would mean more delay.

The other reason was that a hearing by the full committee was a recognition of the importance and urgency of this legislation. In consequence I was able to persuade not only the chairman of the full committee, Senator Henry Jackson of Washington, but two other members, Lee Metcalf of Montana and Paul Fannin of Arizona to adjust their schedules during the session of Congress to hold those hearings.

Senator Jackson had scheduled two days for those hearings. I insisted that two days was not enough. I felt that everyone who wanted to testify should be given a chance to do so.

And so the hearings were scheduled for three days.

As a further example of the determination to hear all witnesses, the hearings were scheduled to begin at the extraordinary hours at 8:00 a.m. on the first day, 7:00 a.m. on the second and 6:00 in the morning on the third day.

Never before in the history of the United States Senate have hearings of a Senate Committee been set at so early an hour. I believe that in consequence no one who wished to testify in favor of this legislation was denied the opportunity.

In the weeks preceding these hearings my office had received a number of complaints from Alaskans in opposition to the freeze which Secretary Udall had put on all transfers of land within Alaska with the implication that none would take place until the legislation had been enacted and become law.

I felt this was unnecessary now that machinery for getting the legislation had been set in motion, that the continuation of the freeze would work a needless hardship on a number of people, such as homesteaders, would arouse antagonism and opposition to this legislation, something which I wished to avoid.

I felt it important and continue to feel that we should have as much public sentiment in favor of this legislation and as a generous a settlement as possible.

Now what would be the effect on an individual who has worked for years to secure patent on his homestead, has finally complied with all the complex requirements, has spent his time, effort, labor and money and has thereby completed the requirements for patent, to be told that he cannot have it because this might be included in some of the lands claimed by one or more of the native groups?

Such people would be understandably bitter. In trying to do belated justice to a whole segment of our people you do not help the cause by doing injustice to an individual.

The solution of such a situation, in my judgment, would be for the homesteader to be given his patent and that if the 160 acre tract was later found to be within a justified native claim, then the native claimant would be compensated in cash or, if he preferred, given the choice of another piece of land.

It is for that reason and in order to allay a very considerable body of growing opposition to the native claims legislation that I raised the question in the hearings and stated my view that the Secretary's action in freezing all the land is not proper.

I question whether it was necessary and instead of helping to promote the legislation was actually impeding it.

I know that many of my native friends do not share that view and feel the legislation would not have gotten as far as it has without the freeze and some of them interpret my questioning of the wisdom and propriety Secretary setting aside by executive action of the provision of the Statehood Act as a lack of enthusiasm for the legislation.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The legislation would not now be in the promising position it is if it had not been for my unremitting efforts, which I shall continue until the legislation is enacted by the Senate in a generous a form as the Senate can be persuaded to adopt.

I am not certain that we can get it passed in this Congress in view of the far reaching character but I shall certainly try.

Meanwhile those of us, native and non-native, concerned with the success of the legislation, should realize that even if the Senate should pass it in this session, it would not become law because the House would not have acted.

Senate favorable action in this session, if it takes place, would not carry over to the next Congress. It would have to be done all over again. So every effort should be made to get the House of Representatives to hold hearings before its Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs so that we might have a chance of legislation in this Congress.

I find it difficult to understand why no efforts to secure such House action have been made. Failure to get such action would make it more difficult for the Senate to get House action especially in an election year because many senators will feel that the procedure would be a waste of time in this Congress unless there is a reasonable probability of House action.

Upward Bound Grant for UA

The Office of Economic Opportunity has awarded the University of Alaska at College, an Upward Bound grant of $149,980 for 82 students from throughout the state.