

GOV., ASNA TO TAKE 'BULL BY THE HORNS' ON LAND MATTERS

Both Parties to Stress Early Settlement

By Tom Snapp

Both Governor Walter J. Hickel and representatives of the Arctic Slope Native Association agreed this week to take the "bull by the horns" in the settlement of Native Land Claims.

And in a conference in Juneau both the Governor and the Natives stressed they were interested in so doing to promote the early and orderly development of the state.

The governor ordered Attorney General Donald Burr to file a suit as soon as possible against the Secretary of Interior seeking to force him to give patent to certain lands on the North Slope to the state.

This suit presumably would have the effect of testing the validity of Native land claims, something that both the Governor and the Association is interested in doing.

The filing of such a suit is costly and the Arctic Slope Native Association indicated that it did not desire to be placed into the position of having to file such a suit itself at this time.

Attorneys for the association indicated, however, that

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the association would probably enter the suit as an interested third party, claiming that the land in question was theirs and the federal government had no right to pass title.

Emphasizing that oil development in the Arctic Slope should not be stopped, Gov. Hickel said he wanted to go ahead, and was going ahead, with a proposed oil lease sale of 37,000 acres of land on the North Slope later this month.

Stressing it was also interested in continued development, the Arctic Slope Native Association indicated it would be agreeable not to intervene in the proposed sale if the purchaser would pay it not to sue.

The effect of such a pact would probably be that the oil companies would pay to the association a percentage of the amount it would normally pay to the state for such leases.

A precedent for such an agreement was set when in 1952 the Colorado Oil and Gas Co. entered into an agreement with the Yakutat Indians whereby it agreed to pay Yakutat \$50,000 for his promise not to sue in a lease sale of lands nearby.

Such a pact would not effect the basic claim of the Eskimo to the land itself. It would simply mean that the Eskimos would not be able to take legal action against the purchaser of the lease but would have to make such claim to the U.S. Government.

At the 2-hour conference held in the Governor's office, there was quite an exchange of ideas in an attempt to work out the common problem and a spirit of understanding resulted.

Representing the ASNA were: Sam Taalak, president, and Hugh Nicholls, executive director, and Frederick Paul, the association's attorney.

Representing the state were: Governor Hickel, Attorney General Donald Burr, and Phil Holdsworth, Commissioner, Department of Interior, Juneau.

Representing other interested Native Associations were: Jules Wright, president of the Fairbanks Native Association and a state legislator; John Sackett, president of Tanana Chiefs and a state legislator; Byron Mallot, representative at large, Council of Five Chiefs, Yakutat, and Walter Soboleff, grand president of the Alaska Native Brotherhood.