

Sen. Bartlett Lauds Native Politics

The increased political activity of Alaska Natives is "a force for good, for solving problems which have been with us too long," Senator E. L. (Bob) Bartlett told the annual meeting of the Association on American Indian Affairs Monday.

Bartlett, the featured speaker at the banquet in New York City, praised this activity as an example of how minorities can use the power of their votes to help find their rightful place in the overall society.

"We (the white majority) have assumed the role of angels and asked our minor-

ities to keep the faith..." said Bartlett.

"The Alaska Native is proving again that man can be trusted to govern himself, and that when he does, he, better than angels, can find ways to solve his problems."

Bartlett traced the effects the political pressure has had in aiding the Native people, starting with housing. With help from the Association, a \$10 million housing program was authorized, and \$1 million requested in the 1968 budget.

However, the total housing needs in the State are estimated at \$75 to \$100 million.

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Bartlett Lauds . . .

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Bartlett noted that, at Barrow, the relatively high incomes had allowed housing to be provided through Federal home loans.

He expressed regret that the outdated piecemeal approach did not provide combined housing and economic development to make new homes the beginning of a new life.

On education, Bartlett noted that there are fine new programs, yet the textbooks used in the Native schools have almost no relationship to the lives of the children. He said he had seen lessons on school blackboards that covered wheat and bananas, but never ones on walrus, seals or berries.

He urged work on new textbooks, especially primary readers, to include things already familiar to the rural Native students to make education as easy and as meaningful as possible.

On employment, Bartlett said that—omitting the Division of Indian Health and the Bureau of Indian Affairs—only 391 of 9,038 Federal civilian employees in Alaska are Natives. Although he did not want to play a numbers game, he felt this showed room for improvement.

However, the answers to his inquiry indicated that some of the departments were not too pleased with what they had to report. Bartlett feels that there is a great possibility of improvement in the near future.

Bartlett said that he counted the Pribilof home-rule bill among his proudest legislative achievements. Under his bill, the residents of St. Paul were allowed private ownership of homes, municipal government instead of bureau govern-

ment, and freedom to leave the island.

The bill not only gave the islanders the rights of other citizens, but inspired other communities to plan for solving their own problems, Bartlett said.

“One outgrowth of this heightened awareness of what can be accomplished by seeking rather than waiting is the extensive Native land claims which now cover most of Alaska,” he said.

He noted that only the Tlingit and Haida Indians of the Southeastern Alaska have been able to litigate land claims. They were authorized this in 1935, filed suit in 1947, and a decision on title was granted in 1959. The value of the land taken has not been determined.

But in 1966, with the growing political awareness there came a realization that the Native land claims matter could no longer be ignored.

A bill was drafted by a statewide Native conference and, although a number of politicians did “have second thoughts after November 8,” some of its ideas may appear in the Interior Department’s bill.

“I think even now it is possible to see where the political actions launched so relatively recently by Alaska Natives will lead,” Bartlett said. “Congress will pass some Native claims legislation, if not in this Congress, the next.

“Whatever the final terms of the legislation I am confident the act will provide some base on which the Natives can judge from the Tyonek Indians, and I think we can, they will build well, and they will do most of the building themselves.”