

# AFN PR Man Speaks to Council of Churches

*(EDITOR'S NOTE: Tom Richards, Jr. has been on a two weeks leave after completing Navy boot training at San Diego. Before joining the Navy, Tom was the reporter-photographer for the Tundra Times. He is returning to the Navy this weekend for assignment.)*

By THOMAS RICHARDS, JR.

KOTZEBUE, (Special)—James Thomas, Director of Public Relations for the Alaska Federation of Natives, addressed the Twelfth Annual Assembly of the Alaska Council of Churches Tuesday in Kotzebue on the Native Land Claims issue.

Thomas, a Tlingit Indian from Yakutat, told the churchmen that the Church is "the crux of Native society."

He expressed appreciation for

the Council's assistance in recently winning the National Council of Churches' endorsement of a just and speedy settlement of the claims.

Discussing the involvement of Alaska churches in the claims issue, Thomas stated, "The good of mission evangelism is worthless . . . without the good of social justice."

"If you people place any value in your God," he added, "then you can understand what the people feel about their land."

Thomas requested the Alaska Churchmen to "pray that our attitude and approach always remain positive."

Speaking generally on the land claims, he explained that the Alaska Federation of Natives had sought a settlement through Congress in order to avoid the longer delay of the courts.

Thomas predicted action in Senate soon.

"We expect that they (the Senate Interior and Insular Affairs Committee) will have a bill out by the end of March."

The AFN PR Chief warned that, if the settlement terms provided by the legislation are thought insufficient by Alaska Natives, the AFN may request the Alaska Congressional Delegation to kill the bill.

"Any settlement terms . . . must be based on the economic figures of today," he stated.

Thomas said the request to kill the legislation would come

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only if the settlement terms are viewed as poor by Alaska Natives, and only if the land freeze would be continued to allow Congress to consider the claims legislation again next year.

"It is a matter of public record that Secretary Hickel intends to lift the freeze December 31 of this year. So we do have a deadline for justice," stated Thomas.

In spite of this deadline, he added, AFN efforts have brought significant results. "Our Washington State campaign alone has generated some 7,000 letters," he told the Council.

Thomas concluded his remarks by urging the churchmen to further aid the AFN effort, particularly through a letter-writing campaign to Washington legislators.

The speech was well received by delegates of the Alaska Council of Churches and by the many Kotzebue residents attending the Assembly.

Thomas left Kotzebue Tuesday evening enroute to Washington, D.C., where he joined the delegation of Native leaders on hand for the Senate Interior Committee mark-up session.