

ANALYZING BILL DIFFICULT



ASNA BRIEFING—Arctic Slope executive director, Charles Edwardsen, Jr. and attorney James Wickwire attended a briefing last week in Wash-

ington to bone up on provisions of the land claims bill passed by the Senate Interior Committee. Photo by TOM RICHARDS, JR.

Difficulties: Bill Not Yet Drafted and Contains Many Varied Proposals

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WASHINGTON, D.C. (September 20)—Anyone wishing to analyze the Alaska native land claims bill which was reported out of the Senate Interior Committee September 15 faces a difficult task for two reasons.

Understanding of what the Senate wishes to accomplish is hard to achieve because the bill has not yet been drafted. An even more complicating factor is the presence of so many varied proposals in the legislation dealing with a multitude of Alaska problems that it is difficult to ascertain which proposals are intended to settle the Alaska native land claims.

Discussion of the proposed legislation during the mark-up session lasted less than two hours and 15 minutes. The committee required less than three minutes to decide which land provisions to incorporate into the bill.

Senator Stevens argued for his proposal, which would provide for 40 million acres in contiguous block selections to natives. Majority counsel Wil-

liam Van Ness explained the staff proposal for 50 million acres, providing only 30 million in fee simple title and 20 million in land use permits.

Why not have both, asked Senator Jackson. Senator Gravel endorsed the option and everybody else accepted the compromise.

The reason for such rapid action, explains Stevens, is that Senate will have to move fast to get the bill on the calendar for a vote this year.

A senatorial aide later suggested that a bill is sometimes hurriedly reported out in order to prevent prospective critics from having time to react against it.

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Both Stevens and Gravel favored much of the land-use planning proposals, but clashed over the pipeline corridor ("Recreation and Transportation Corridor") Provision.

Stevens said that he felt it was a good idea to have the corridor included in planning provisions and that it would guarantee close federal supervision of pipeline construction.

Gravel, says Stevens, opposed the corridor because Alyeska did not favor it.

A Gravel spokesman responded that congressional action on the corridor was unnecessary and could even trigger longer delays prior to pipeline construction.

The two Alaska senators also argued bitterly over the issue of non-competitive leasing would bring more revenues and Stevens insisting that there would be no demand for leases on that basis.

Gravel and Jackson differed on the number of regions in the post-settlement structure; Jackson wanted 7 and Gravel 12, so the chairman got 7.

Stevens introduced an amendment to require all natives who have allotments pending to choose between getting title to their allotments or losing all benefits under the land claims bill.

Eager young lawyers, he states, enticed natives into filing 10,999 allotments on some of

the best land in Alaska. They could not demonstrate occupancy and would tie up development during the slow process of adjudicating their claims.

A Gravel spokesman responded that there are 2,000 and not 10,000 allotments pending. Furthermore, if native allotments are to be repealed, should not homesteading suffer the same fate.

Gravel is reported to be considering that all natives on Indian reservations in Alaska be given the same option as Veneti and Metlakatla in retaining their reservation land.

As the bill now stands, reservation land will not be terminated and those villages on reservations will have to file new selections based on the bills land formula.

Noticably silent are spokesmen for the Alaska Federation of Natives. AFN President Don Wright, state Senator Willie Hensley, and Arctic Slope Executive Director Charles Edwardson, Jr., have told newsmen only that the bill is currently undergoing comprehensive review by Alaska native representatives.

The House Interior Committee will resume mark-up on its land claims bill Wednesday. Although optimistic about the meeting, Alaska Congressman Nick Begich stated he could not be very certain about the outcome of the session.