

ROADBLOCK: LAND SELECTION

Wright Disappointed Governor, Delegation Not in Solid Position

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WASHINGTON, D.C.—As the House-Senate Conference Committee began its week of meetings on the Alaska Native Land Claims bill Tuesday, Governor William A. Egan prepared to leave Juneau to be in Washington for the committee's work.

"I think its imperative that I be there, in case they have questions of me," Egan reported Tuesday morning.

The major roadblock to a settlement of the land claims before Congress adjourns December 9 is the question of land selection.

In Washington on Monday, Don Wright, President of the AFN told the TUNDRA TIMES that he is greatly disappointed in the inability of the members of the Alaska Congressional delegation and the Governor of Alaska to unify on one solid land claims position.

Wright stated his concern that the delegation and the Governor would not commit themselves to a position on the claims issue which would be

acceptable to the AFN. At this time, Wright said, he still had no idea of what the outcome will be from the meetings of the House-Senate conference

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Land Selection May Be Roadblock ...

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committee on land claims.

The conference committee is slated to begin its meetings at 2:30 p.m. Tuesday afternoon and work through Friday or Saturday on writing a bill which will be acceptable to both Houses of Congress.

Senator Gravel, believes Wright, while promising support of the AFN in the Conference Committee, has not made a strong stand publicly. Congressman Nick Begich, he adds, had made no commitment to Alaskan natives even though he had worked diligently during House deliberations.

The strongest support, continued Wright, has come from Senator Ted Stevens. Although Stevens does not completely favor the AFN position, his proposal for 40 million acres of land in contiguous selection is the best he has seen, said Wright.

Senator Stevens told the TUNDRA TIMES last week that, the AFN has already foreclosed any effective opposition," against the report of the conference committee. Stevens noted that he does not support the AFN position because "there is a feeling (in Congress) that every time we find a way to accommodate a request that the request is increased."

The 40 million acre option, stated the Senator, is more in line with the wishes of the people in the bush. Stevens

said that he will live with the decision made in the Conference Committee.

If the AFN should request that the legislation be killed, he added, he probably would not go along with that request.

"I don't believe the AFN could kill the bill," says Stevens.

Senator Gravel, according to administrative assistant Joe Rothstein, will fully back the AFN position during the Conference Committee deliberations.

"Many people in Alaska have been saying that we have sold out to the natives and that we are dead politically," Rothstein noted.

"I hope that native people heard these comments and are aware of the position that we have taken."

Selection rights are expected to be the most divisive issue in the House-Senate conference committee, according to Rep. Nick Begich.

According to the House bill, Natives would receive first selection rights of 16 to 18 million acres. Then the state gets second pick and the Natives select what's left up to 40 million

acres.

The Senate bill allows natives to select 40 million acres around their villages before any state selections or choose 20 million acres in surface title only and 10 million in fee title acres selected anywhere in the state."