

200 ASNA MEMBERS MEET

Chart Out Future Course of Action

By TIM BRADNER

BARROW (Special)—Last week an estimated 200 villagers from communities scattered the length of Alaska's storm-battered Arctic coast met here at Barrow.

In a jam-packed classroom in Barrow's old elementary school building, delegates to the first general meeting of the

Arctic Slope Native Association met to chart out future courses of action for the new, aggressive Native group that seems to be taking the world by the tail and swinging it for all it's worth.

Last week leaders of the organization stunned state political circles by endorsing candidates in forthcoming 1966 elections, and by naming a full slate of Democrats for office before Republicans had even filed.

Last January, the group filed a blanket land claim on 96 million acres of potentially oil-rich areas of the Arctic.

It was the largest aboriginal land claim on record, over an area larger than the state of Texas.

Friday, gathered villagers listened to tape-recorded testimony from Kaktovik, a tiny village of 150 on Barter Island, near Alaska's Arctic border with Canada.

The tapes, recorded in Eskimo dialect that was not un-

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ARCTIC SLOPE NATIVE ASSOCIATION OFFICIALS—Some of the officials of the ASNA are pictured and those identifiable are: front row left to right, James Nageak, Abel Akpik, Samuel Simmonds, Walton Ahmoogak, Sam Taalak, president, and Herman Rexford. Back row: first person, not identified, cen-

ter, Othneil Oomittuk, woman not identified, Othneil Oomittuk, Point Hope and Herman Rexford, Kaktovik, were representatives from their respective villages.

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derstood by white visitors to the meeting, told the story of a people's close ties to their land.

Attorneys for the Barrow-based action group will use the tapes to back up, in Court, the land claim. The land is theirs, villagers claim, by reason of occupation "from time immemorial."

FIRST MEETING

Last Friday marked the association's first general meeting of its members.

Delegates from Kaktovik, on Barter Island to the east of Barrow, came along with representatives from Wainwright and Point Hope, to the west.

Anaktuvuk Pass and Point Lay delegates were delayed by bad weather and missed the meeting.

The meeting had been called to discuss, among the general membership, the giant land claim that could, if the Arctic tundra proves out the petroleum potential geologists hint at, make villagers oil-wealthy.

Discussions last Friday may lead to an official challenge of the U.S. Navy's jurisdiction over Petroleum Reserve No. 4.

The Navy's reservation covers thousands of square miles of tundra, with proven oil and natural gas fields.

Other areas of the Arctic, east of the Colville River boundary of the reserve, have recently been opened to commercial mineral leasing and development by the Department of the Interior.

U.S. and foreign oil companies have been busy conducting seismic mapping and exploratory drilling on land that could, geologists claim, prove out to be some of the biggest crude oil reservoirs in the world.

Commercial test-drilling has met with limited degrees of success.

Crude oil from wells on the Umiat field, within the reserve, is so pure that it is al-

most diesel-caliber. Workmen at Umiat use the crude in their generators without trouble.

WANT TITLE

Officers of the Arctic Native Association say they want outright title to the land.

They will not be "bought off" by proposals of monetary compensation for the loss of aboriginal rights, as was negotiated in the famous Tlingit-Haida land-claim settlement in Southeast Alaska.

They also took another verbal blast at Alaska's junior U.S. Senator, Sen. Ernest Gruening, for proposing monetary compensation to settle Alaska Native land claims.

Gruening suggested compensation and a closure date for filing of land protests. He said the claims were retarding economic growth in rural areas of the state.

Sam Taalak, president of the association, addressed gathered members in the native Eskimo tongue:

"We want title to this land. Within this area, we have always made our living. If we do not claim the land now, it will be taken away from us, and our animals and fish will soon be gone."

Giving "Alaska's Native people ownership of their land, it was said, would open the way to commercial development of the land, and would provide a key to an income for income-poor bush areas of the state.

"The proof is there," an earlier statement from the group's leaders said, "that a just settlement of Native claims will help the state instead of hindering it. The additional tax revenue alone will bolster considerably the state's precarious financial burdens."

"The Native, as long as he remains landless, will also remain taxless. Being deprived of his land by the Federal Government, it is the responsibility of the government to either recognize his land

claims so that they may become taxable, or provide the best for him in lieu thereof."

CLAIM FILED

Claim on the huge North Slope area, stretching from the Canadian border through the Brooks Range to the Chukchi Sea coast south of Point Hope, was filed with the Department of the Interior last January.

The claim was filed in the form of a protest against transfer of title on lands presently held under "public domain" by the Department of the Interior.

This freezes title on the areas under protest, preventing sale, or selection by the State of Alaska, until the aboriginal land question is settled by the U.S. Supreme Court or Congress.

Gov. William Egan has termed the aboriginal land protests by Indians and Eskimos in the state, "one of the most serious problems facing Alaska today."

The Barrow claim on 96 million acres brings the total Alaska lands under claim to 218 million acres—almost 58% of the total land area in the state.

POLITICS DISCUSSED

Aside from the land question, political topics dominated the Barrow meeting.

A week before officers of the association had released tentative endorsements of candidates in 1966 elections who, they believed, would work in the best interests of Alaska Natives.

Last Friday the general membership of the association, with applause, ratified the candidate choices.

Gov. William Egan was endorsed in his bid for re-election, as was Sen. E.L. (Bob) Bartlett for the U.S. Senate.

Local candidates, Sen. Eben Hopson in his bid for Secretary of State and John Nusunginya, of Barrow, for House of Representatives, were also endorsed.

The only incumbent high

office-holder not endorsed was U.S. Rep. Ralph Rivers.

Rivers was blasted as, "a not worthy of a single native vote" and the Association instead chose to back Mike Gravel, state Speaker of the House, for Congress.

Gravel is predicted to file soon for River's seat.

The Native Association's selections raised furor in many statewide political circles, particularly in the GOP camp.

A full slate of Democrats had been endorsed by the group before Republicans had even filed.

YOUTH IN REVOLT

The Arctic Slope Native Association, although not the first Alaska Native organization formed for purely political purposes, is already loud and most aggressive and destined to be, perhaps, the most effective.

The group was an outgrowth of another recently-formed Barrow organization—the Barrow Improvement Board.

Four young men were instrumental in giving birth to the BIB—Lester Savlu, Charles Edwardson, James Nageak and Abel Akpik.

The organization now numbers about 50 young Barrow residents, and is pushing for local community improvement.