

Fink's Bill Would Kill Rural Housing Prog.

Representative Tom Fink (R-Anchorage) has filed a bill in the current legislative session that, for most of the state, would kill all hope of new rural housing programs in the immediate future.

This bill (HB 47) is intended to take \$1,200,000 in existing state funds that have been reserved for the development of rural housing programs and place it in the state general fund.

It would also cancel the state's authority to raise an additional \$1,500,000 for rural housing through the sale of bonds.

The bill is scheduled for hearing before the House State Affairs Committee on January 29th. State Senator John Sackett (R-Galena), who as president of Tanana Chiefs Region has been concerned with the development of rural housing programs, summarized testimony he plans to give before this committee.

"Housing is one of the most critical needs in rural Alaska. These funds are of the utmost importance in implementing small programs in rural regions. The Tanana Chiefs' region alone probably needs at least 5 or 6 million in overall housing funds.

"I think the reason Tom Fink introduced this bill was because he thought that HUD (Housing and Urban Development, a department of the federal government) would be taking care of this kind of program

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which, of course, they are not. All the HUD projects have come to a halt."

Under President Nixon's Indian Housing program, Alaska was scheduled for 6,000 units of rural housing over the next five years. Senator Ted Stevens and former Alaska Federation of Natives president Don Wright announced the beginning of this program in April of 1971. Following that, the AFN, the Alaska State Housing Authority, and the Tlingit-Haida, NANA and Arctic Slope Regional Associations, all worked on developing rural housing, utilizing the funds provided by the President's program.

The first of these housing developments subjected to federal review, was AFN's proposal for the village of Gambell. There was only one bidder on the project and his estimate of cost was \$81,000 for each 2 to 3 bedroom unit in a 30-unit proposal.

This far exceeded the allowable cost per unit for eligibility in the President's program.

After November of 1972, the only program in the state that seemed to have any chance of receiving federal funds under the Indian Housing Act, was that of Tlingit-Haida.

This was due to the lower cost of construction and a higher average income in this region. However, to date, even Tlingit-Haida has not received the funding for their proposal.

After the failure of the ASHA, AFN and regional programs to secure federal funding, the Alaska State Housing Authority submitted a plan to Gov. Egan for the development of rural housing, using funds already allocated by the state for this purpose under the Alaska Remote Housing Program, the same funds that Rep. Fink's bill proposes be withdrawn. The ASHA plan is presently under consideration by the Governor.

The aim of the plan is to solve the difficulty of developing housing in Alaska's remote regions through a series of small pilot projects in construction and rehabilitation, that will lay down guidelines for other programs to follow.

It would seem the need for rural housing in Alaska is quite pressing. President Johnson's Field Committee, which did a survey on the state's housing needs, called for the construction of 8,000 units of rural housing. Since then, only 446 units have been actually built.

The problem of rural housing is relatively new and the first large-scale attempts at solving it are just being made. Bill Tegoseak, former coordinator of native regional programs for ASHA, noted that "200 years ago many Natives lived in sod huts underground.

"These were ideal because of their warmth in winter, but the coming of western civilization brought contagious diseases which forced the Native people to move into better ventilated modern housing."

The whole problem may have been best summed up by an anonymous King Islander, who said:

"Before the missionaries came, we lived in sod houses and laid our dead on the tundra . . . Now we live above ground and bury our dead — and I haven't really been warm since."