

Federal Omission in Alaska Of Model Cities Program Hit

JUNEAU—Gov. Walter J. Hickel has called a federal decision eliminating any Alaskan communities from the Model Cities program a "bitter—virtually tragic—development, as far as the citizens of rural Alaska are concerned."

Hickel added, "Some of our rural citizens are enduring conditions of poverty equal to the worst to be found anywhere on the face of the earth. They cannot understand what prompted the federal government to turn down the Model Cities program applications of three Alaskan communities."

Hickel returned last week from several days of meetings in Washington with several federal officials including Sargent Shriver, head of the Office of Economic Opportunity.

At a meeting of the NORTH Commission, the group selected by Hickel to ramrod efforts to extend the Alaska Railroad into the Arctic as a major tool to bring about economic development, particularly in the Arctic, Shriver has told Hickel:

"We're on the same track. We've got to give these people year 'round jobs to lead them to dignified lives ...we are interested in trying to help people prepare for work."

Hickel commented, "Sargent Shriver and so many other federal officials have been most cooperative and helpful in trying to solve the problems we face in Alaska, especially in the rural areas, through programs such as those administered by the

OEO.

"Because of this, we find it even harder to understand why other federal officials decided to cut Bethel, Anchorage and Juneau from the Model Cities program.

"We apparently have a wide difference of opinion in Washington over the value of including Alaska in these various programs which could help us so much."

Some 63 cities in the Lower 48 will share in \$11 million in planning funds for the Model Cities program under direction of the Department of Housing and Urban development, which is headed by Secretary Robert Weaver.

The Governor said he found it "fantastically difficult to understand why an economically-depressed Alaskan community such as Bethel was cut from the program, while wealthy areas in the Lower 48 were included."

"I know," Hickel added, "that many of the nation's cities include areas which are riddled with problems directly attributable to poor housing, unemployment and

other factors.

"However, I submit that many of these metropolitan problems in the lower states

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can be answered with a wealth of other programs which are available, while the Model Cities program is one of the few ways we can alleviate much of the rural poverty conditions in Alaska in the area of housing."

Slashing of the Alaskan communities from the program "makes it even more vital," the Governor continued, "that our congressional delegation in Washington continue to press for restoration of the funds which were cut from the Bartlett Native Housing Program.

Just before he left for Washington last week, Hickel announced that he will ask the next session of the Alaska Legislature for an increased appropriation which will double the state's participation—up to \$1 million—as its share of funding for the rural housing program.

The Governor said the move was an effort to get Congress to restore an appropriation for that part of the Demonstration Cities Act of 1966.

On Oct. 20 a joint Senate—House conference committee approved an appropriation bill for the act, but only after funds for the Alaska portion of the program were deleted.