

# Republican gubernatorial candidate Walter Hickel

*This is another in a series of interviews of political candidates offered by the Tundra Times as a service to our readers in this political season.* □

Republican Walter Hickel's political activity started in the 1950s, with the fight for Alaska statehood. He has served once as governor of the state, from December of 1966 to January of 1969, when he left his post to become secretary of the Interior under then-President Richard Nixon.

As governor of the state of Alaska, Hickel was instrumental in developing Alaska's North Slope oil resources. Hickel was strongly opposed to the land freeze instituted by Secretary Udall during the Johnson Administration.

When he was nominated to the secretary's post, Hickel vowed to undo the land freeze, which at that time was Alaska Natives' only guarantee that land claims would be dealt with quickly and fairly. Prior to his confirmation, Native leaders were able to secure his promise that the land freeze would stand until land claims were dealt with by Congress.

As the man to beat for the Republican gubernatorial nomination, Hickel has recently had criticism leveled at him by opponents, who charge him with trying to buy the nomination with his own money, and with being a "johnny-come-lately" in the race.

Our interview was conducted by Editor Jim Benedetto in Hickel's office in the Captain Cook Hotel. Photos are by Norris Klesman.

**TUNDRA TIMES:** *Mr. Hickel, you sent a letter to Sen. Wallop, Chairman of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, which has been considering S.2065, the so-called "1991" amendments to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971. In that letter, you indicated your opposition to the passage of those amendments this year; later, you sent another letter at the request of the Alaska Federation of Natives, in which you clarified your views on the legislation. What is the nature of your concern over the passage of these amendments?*

**HICKEL:** It's basically what I said when I announced... I thought that most of the problems — and there were some — could be solved under the constitution of the state of Alaska, whether it was the Land Bank or whether it was government. Now, some technicalities couldn't; but those technicalities we should take to the Senate. From the standpoint of the state of Alaska, I don't want to see Alaska give up anything to the federal government that we can solve ourselves, because, then if we have to change it, you can come back to the state. We can handle it so much better. Once it gets to the federal hands — and I used to run that department — and they're great guys, but to get something out of that, it becomes a very bureaucratic thing, and then it becomes a very political thing; that was my reason for my letter to Malcolm Wallop.

**TUNDRA TIMES:** *Mr. Hickel, when you were governor of Alaska, your response to the Land Freeze, which was important incentive for settlement of Native land claims, was to sue the federal government to lift the freeze. Is that an example of how much better state government can solve the problems of Native people?*

**HICKEL:** I'll tell you a perfect example: Udall put a land freeze on, and broke the Statehood Act, which was our constitutional right to select those lands. Egan had done a good job the first eight years; he had selected them judiciously, and that... Udall put the land freeze on, so we

couldn't. I took him to court for the simple reason that he broke the law... I'm the guy that took the Native land claims thing... I took it to President Nixon in '68 after he got in office, and got the commitment. The federal government never did that, you know, basically.

Udall was trying to settle that thing for \$185 million, he came up to see me. The \$185 million wasn't coming from the federal government, it was coming from Outer Continental Shelf revenues, (but) there wasn't any at that time to amount to anything. If you really look at that, you'll see that, in my opinion, it was a subterfuge not to settle them (the land claims). The land freeze had been going on, and I had been, I knew old

(Continued on Page Nine)







*Tundra Times interview:*

## Republican gubernatorial candidate Walter Hickel

(Continued from Page Seven)

man William Paul for many, many years; they had been trying to settle this for years and years and years. It got settled in 60 days, with one meeting with the president, without spending a lot of money on attorneys — it would've been \$10 million. With six members in that office going against that thing, "There was no legal claim; it didn't fit within the BOB; it was settled when we bought it from Russia," and I took it to the president — this is historical fact — and I said, "Mr. President, I totally agree with everyone here," and then I made my pitch on the moral issue and why we should settle it, and gave him a way to settle it. And that was the 20-year program at \$25 million a year. He dismissed everybody, and said, "I'm going with Wally," and the land freeze was over; I

**"Don't ever think there's a White father real far away. The best White father is the closest one..."**

**—Walter Hickel**

mean, the land claims was over. So, the Secretary of Interior, if he have been from Nebraska, couldn't have done that. He wouldn't have known the issue. We could've done it through the state as governor; it would have been more difficult, but I could have gone to the president and said, "Hey, this is why we want to settle it." The point I'm making, is that if the state of Alaska and the Native people can't work in unison, then we'd have an awful problem. I think we can. I think we know the problems better, and we have more compassion for them, I think that we understand our unique culture, climate, geographical location, and the perception generally, of Alaska, is so much different than its reality, that it's just day and night. I think that's the reason.

**TUNDRA TIMES:** *As long as we have people in state government that are compassionate, and do understand the problems, the state might do alright; but Native people, like anyone else, do not like their rights to depend upon the good will of somebody high up in state government. Even with someone who is very compassionate, as is our present governor, this state has problems. The latest round of difficulties this past year over the subsistence legislation should point that out. How would you reply to such an argument?*

**HICKEL:** Would you much rather have the authority in Washington? That's where you had it for 100 years, and it wasn't any good. Look at your own hole card; if you can't deal with your own people better than Washington, I'm telling you, you can't win.

Now, subsistence is very clear in our constitution; and the Lands Act (Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980) really came in conflict with the state constitution. The state constitution says that the fish and wildlife of this state belongs to the public, totally. I think that basically, if we think together, "We're all Alaskans," we'll win; if we think, "Native, non-Native," we'll lose. I believe that. I believe it strongly.

For an example, let's take a village 100,000 acres. Right now they have stock, but what they really want is to know they have the land. O.K., let's say this village wants 40,000 acres of this land never to be touched. Under a third-class borough, you could do that, and say that

this land shall forever be zoned as a park, or a heritage land, or whatever you want to call it, and nobody could do a thing about it. Then, if you wanted to change it in 20 years or 30 years, you could come back to the state. And the state, under your own jurisdiction, your own guidance, you could change it; you wouldn't have to go to anybody else. And that's why I'm saying, "Please don't put your trust in some foreign god." It was there for 100 years. I've run the reservations and the IRA's, and with all the compassion a guy could have for it, they're so difficult on that kind of bureaucracy. And so, I'm saying, we fought the battle for statehood — I helped fight that battle — I led the battle, personally, on the Native land claims. I know the intention of Wayne Aspinall and 'Scoop' Jackson, I sat down with them...

I know what the intent was; and the intent was exactly as I am speaking to you. And the intent was, it (ANCSA) shall forever settle that issue; the intent was to make that land available as to your desires, more than anything else.

**TUNDRA TIMES:** *It seems to us that many of the examples that you cite to show how much more effective and preferable state authority is to federal authority are instances where you were able to influence the system as an agent of the federal authority.*

**HICKEL:** That's what leadership is all about. Once you get it back here, they don't take it back... you see my point? Once you do something like that, it's an Act. Like the Outer Continental Shelf Act, when I wrote it, I didn't take it to the Senate. That's a cop-out! I wrote it, put it in effect in 120 days. It's the law of the land. Now, Congress can pass a law to change that, but they're not going to do that; they don't have any guts! (laughter).

**TUNDRA TIMES:** *Let's go back to your solution on how the state could protect Native lands from taxation in a third-class borough by designating them "heritage lands," or whatever.*

**HICKEL:** Whatever you want to call it. Whatever the Natives want to call it.

**TUNDRA TIMES:** *What would happen in that situation if the composition of the third-class borough went from predominantly Native to predominantly under the control of non-Natives? What is to stop the white voters of a borough, once they are in the majority, from re-designating those lands and taxing them?*

**HICKEL:** Not under a third-class borough; they don't have any taxing rights. Call it what you like, they don't have any taxing rights.

You see, they have nothing. Our constitution took into consideration all classes. And so, if you want to go to the federal government for protection to do that, then how are you as an individual ever going to have any rights? If you can only sell your stock to a Native corporation, and they don't have any money, you got a piece of paper, that's all you'll have the rest of your life. I'm just asking that, I'm not questioning it. It has no value! For a case of whiskey they could get it. And finally bring it in to the holding company. And finally they'd own all the stock, am I right. You can only sell it to the corporation. You've lost a lot of individual rights. I'm worried about the individual, too. I'm just asking a question; I'm not arguing the point.

Your group has a million acres of land, and no money. So, you got a

(Continued on Page Ten)



## Tundra Times interview:

### Hickel

(Continued from Page Nine)

piece of stock. What's it worth? You can't use it. By the amendments that they try to pass, you cannot use the land as value to the stock. It has no value!!

**TUNDRA TIMES:** *Portions of the land, by majority vote of the stockholders, could be used for development, or even sold to raise capital.*

**HICKEL:** But not as an individual.

**TUNDRA TIMES:** *In a larger sense, we'll admit that the stock and the land, for at least some of the corporations, do not or will not have "value" in the sense that non-Natives think of it. The importance of the land is in how Native people are bonded to it; it has provided all they need to live for thousands of years. Its value is rightly not considered an asset, because many Alaska Native consider themselves merely the caretakers of the land; they don't "own" it. Their job is to pass it to the next generation in much the same way it was passed to them.*

**HICKEL:** I understand that. You can still do that under the state, state or federal. That was my argument. Because I just believe the closer your government to the people... Don't ever think there's a white father real far away. The best white father is the closest one.

The reason the cultures developed in society and in the world, was on account of that close unit. And I don't want to see happen what happened in the south 48. It's very degrading; it's degrading as hell, you've got to believe that. And I think that was one of the reasons why the Native land claims bill went through.

I think, in my own way of thinking, I'm the individual Native's best friend, and yet I understand the corporate structure and how to make it work. I'm willing to listen, but we've studied this thing for a long time.

**TUNDRA TIMES:** *Mr. Hickel, you've said that on the basis of your experience as Secretary of the Interior and your talks with Sen. Jackson, that you understand the intent of the original act. In your opinion, is the 1991 amendment package a significant departure from the original act's intent?*

**HICKEL:** Yes, to the one degree where it takes away the individual opportunity or right. That was the one, that was the strong point. How do we give, how do we... you see, America is basically built on individual rights, rather than on collective rights. Now, I do know the culture and tradition of the Native people have a lot of — what's the word? — a cumulative society; you know, the tribal thing. But the very intent of that, and it was Aspinall that said, "O.K., let's go 20 years, be sure that they have enough time to look, and see. He was very careful not to dispute the individual rights. And that's what Interior is arguing today.

**TUNDRA TIMES:** *Do you believe the concept of sovereignty is antithetical to—*

**HICKEL:** A little bit. We have a sovereign state. And all of us that live within this state. And all of us that live within this state should really be under the sovereign state. I don't think we should have... the word sovereign could be misused. In the so-called, again under the constitution of the state of Alaska, you can have your own government, you know, and still not have the sovereign issue. The sovereign nation, that won't work in a democracy. That won't work under our constitution.

**TUNDRA TIMES:** *Certainly state government must have changed a lot since you were governor. Do you think it will be a great benefit for the state to have someone who has your perspective, if you are elected?*

(Continued on Page Fourteen)

## Tundra Times interview:

### Hickel

(Continued from Page Ten)

**HICKEL:** Bill Egan and I formed Commonwealth North, to study the uniqueness of Alaska. Government here is so unique compared to the south 48, it's entirely different. And I'd say, "Yes." I'm running now to get the state back on the track to where government is not an adversary, but an advocate. The governor of this state has got to be an advocate, and since Hammond came in, it's been an adversary.

---

*"Congress can pass a law to change that, but they're not going to do that; they don't have any guts..."*  
—Walter Hickel

---

I'm going to set up an institution or do something to try to educate the Alaskans what government's all about. This government. I'm running to put it back on the track. Egan put the government together; he did a good job. I made it work. Hammond and Sheffield are running it again like political government, and it pretty near has to be run like, it's got to

have the compassion to the individual, and the hardness of the corporate structure.

**TUNDRA TIMES:** *But government also has to run DEC. Can the government wear both hats? Can the state give DEC what it needs to put some teeth in their regulations, and still be an effective advocate for business and development interests?*

**HICKEL:** You're an advocate not just for business and development; you're an advocate for maybe access to land; you're an advocate for making a recreational area out of Prince William Sound; you're an advocate to develop the Arctic Wildlife Range in that part east of Prudhoe Bay, but you're an advocate to keep the pristine part the way that it is. They ought to hire the governors up here. (laughter) But it is difficult. You have to wear many hats; that's why I was so controversial in Washington. Oh, I was controversial! Because coming out of Alaska, they can't understand that; you know, how you could do this, and how you could be that. I think I'm a good environmentalist. The developers think I'm a strict environmentalist; the environmentalists think I'm a good developer, and that's the way it's got to be. I can't be just a "greenie." And I can't be just a developer, and Alaska can't be that way. You have to be both. You have to be. And I don't give a damn what they think. That's the way I am; and that's the way it'll work. □