

Pipeline Closely Tied to Alaska Native Claims

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WASHINGTON, D.C.—At the time the pipeline hearings concluded here last week, representatives of the oil companies argued that comprehensive pro-

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tective measures will be taken to safeguard the environment along the pipeline route.

Launching strong attacks on the Interior Department's Environmental Impact Statement and on the Trans-Alaska pipeline project, conservationists pleaded for the preservation of Alaska's wilderness.

Most Alaska witnesses, the Governor and his staff and representatives of Native groups, offered testimony which set them apart from the polarized positions of conservation and oil.

"What is lacking in the draft report is a consideration in human terms of the terrible possibilities of loss or of what is to be done in terms of relieving human suffering and of meeting human needs," stated Don Wright, President of the Alaska Federation of Natives.

"What is needed also is a recognition that the best way to assure protection of the land is by invoking the participation of those most dependent on it," added Wright.

Wright also noted that the pipeline proposal is closely tied

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Pipeline and Claims...

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to the settlement of the land claims of Alaska natives. This position was shared by Alaska Governor William A. Egan.

"Though the pipeline cannot realistically be built until a Native claims bill passes the Congress, the building of a pipeline is a practical necessity to a meaningful implementation of the native claims," the Governor stated.

The Governor also expressed concern for the lack of attention given the people affected by the pipeline within Alaska.

"We cannot lock up all the vast natural resources of the State of Alaska in every corner of the land, ignoring the cry of poverty, of human want, of human ignorance and disease which it is in our power to cure.

"We cannot ignore the economic loss which translates into increased unemployment, higher relief roles, increased crime and human suffering which has already resulted from the uncertainty and delay on this project," said the Governor.

Cecil Barnes, representing the Chugach Native Association, was one of a number of natives who came to Washington to testify. The Chugach Native Association represents natives living near the southern terminus of the proposed pipeline route.

Barnes objected to the absence of concern for the people who live along the route.

"There is much thought about trees and wilderness, but little about human environment and human resources," he stated.

Anticipating economic benefits from pipeline construction, the Chugach Natives formed a development corporation which was named North Gulf Natives, Inc.

"North Gulf Natives, Inc. favor building of a safe pipeline subject and subsequent to a fair and equitable settlement of the native land claims," said Barnes.

He noted that natives favor environmental protection, stating that native influence to impose a land freeze in Alaska was some indication of their desire to protect the environment.

Another spokesman, Richard Frank of Minto, opposed pipeline construction and demonstrated fear that damage may be similar to pollution caused by mining operations in the interior.

With the exception of Frank, most natives indicated they would favor construction of the pipeline should the Alaska Native Land Claims be justly resolved.

One prominent Washington attorney, respected for his expert knowledge of land law, predicted however, that conservationists might effectively block construction of the pipeline project for as long as five years.