

Letters from Here and There

April 3, 1970

Representative Gene Guess
House of Representatives
Pouch V — State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Dear Representative Guess:

The action taken by the Alaska Federation of Natives' Board of Directors on the Legislative Council's State land claims bill deserves some clarification.

Newspaper coverage of the AFN action did not convey the real feeling of the Board. The Board recognizes and deeply appreciates the efforts of the Legislative Council under your leadership to develop a meaningful method of State contribution to the land claims settlement. Statements to that effect were made repeatedly by Board members during discussion of the bill.

It must be understood that Alaska's Native people, for very good reason, have come to be highly suspicious of even well-intentioned efforts at assistance which lodge real control of programs and funds not in the hands of the Native people but in some bureaucratic structure. Thus, the Board was critical of basic administrative details of the bill which vested, in the Board's view, significant control in a single state agency director.

The Board was not "looking a gift horse in the mouth" as some commentary would have it, but rather was acting as responsibly as possible, for the State land claims bill will have a profound impact on the future of Alaska's Natives. There was no doubt good reason for the Legislative Council to draft the bill

without broad contribution from Native groups to its development. However, the Board felt that it must insist that Native people be involved in the development of programs which will affect them significantly. Anyone who has any knowledge at all of "Indian programs" of state and federal agencies can hardly blame the AFN Board for feeling in this regard as it does.

The specific action taken by the Board requesting that the Governor convene the Rural Affairs Commission to discuss this matter was not meant as a "slap" at the legislature or the Legislative Council's efforts. Very simply, the only State vehicle available which can quickly fund and handle a gathering of Native leaders is the Rural Affairs Commission of which most of the AFN Board are members.

I know that it is not your feeling or the feeling of the legislature that since the AFN Board has "rejected" the State claims bill the legislature should take no further action on State participation in the claims settlement. The AFN Board did not "reject" the bill, rather it proceeded to constructively react to provisions of the bill. The State does have an obligation to participate in the claims settlement which, at least, the legislative branch has acknowledged not only with words but with action.

It is hoped that this letter provides some understanding and clarification of the AFN Board's action.

Sincerely,
Byron I. Mallott