

## Alaska - Yukon Territory



# Gas Pipeline Update

From the Yukon Indian News

Five panelists spoke to approximately 70 people at the third session of the Public Information series on land claims held at the Indian Centre November 20 in Whitehorse.

Paul Birckel, Executive Director of Council of Yukon Indians (CYI), the first speaker, spoke briefly on the historical and traditional ways of the Yukon Indians. He spoke on the use of land by the Indians, the coming of the whiteman with the Gold Rush, Alaska Highway and how the Indian people dealt with the changes.

Today the Native people are looking at a land claims settlement. Birckel stated that the essence of a settlement is the survival of the Indian people. The direction of land claims is towards self-sufficiency and self-control so that the Yukon Indians would be able to join with the white in making the Yukon the best possible place for all to live. The Indian people believe that the basis for that equality and freedom of choice is land.

The next speaker was Ian MacKay, who spoke on behalf of the businessmen, how they see the land claims settlement. MacKay stated that the businessmen have two major concerns, one being the short term impacts of settlement in regards to royalties, and cash that would directly affect businessmen. A further concern was with the "power of cash" and that it be used wisely by the Indian people. MacKay stated that the businessmen would not like to be put out of business by "their own tax dollar." Ideally the businessmen would like to see the Indian people go into businesses that would "fill in the gaps." MacKay stated that the businessmen looked upon land claims as an economic base for the Native people, but that it must be looked upon realistically in terms of the white society instead of Indian traditions.

Emil Notti, senior vice-president of the Doyon Corporation, spoke on the land claims impact in Alaska.

Notti stated that Alaska claims did not take place under true negotiations. The Congress went behind closed doors and wrote out the settlement act, Notti said, and as a result, the Alaska Natives lost many major points in their negotiations.

Notti generally painted a "negative" picture of the benefit of a land claims settlement, in regards to cash and lands which was the basis of their claims. The cash element in land claims does not compare with the money spent on the pipeline, he said. On the individual basis the cash impact has been minimal. The major impacts with money being in the cities where office buildings and hotels went in. Even the corporations themselves are very small in comparison to the national and multi-national corporations moving into Alaska, Notti said. The \$900 million is not, by business standards, a very large sum, he said, especially after you break it down into regional and village corporations.

Where part of their benefits have come has been with land holdings. Alaska (Natives) are the second largest land holder in Alaska, he said. There is a lot of interest in Native lands right now, Notti said, but the Natives are very intent on protecting their lifestyles, so the development of these lands are not so great. However, the Native people are now faced with the fact that the Alaska State legislature want to pass a bill taxing all lands developed, including Native land holdings.

Bill Webber, president of YANSI, spoke on the Options for Socio-Economic Development Post Settlement Period. The main goal of the Yukon Indians in reaching a settlement is that they become the beneficiaries of development rather than its victims, he said.

This, Webber maintains, can be done by striking a balance between both renewable and non-renewable resource development. He further stated that there must be development options for both individuals and communities, and that Indian people must be in a position to control development that will affect them. Social development must of necessity go hand in hand with economic development, he said.

In the past there has been a misconception that only large scale resource extraction projects are feasible, that renewable resources are not, therefore, the Indian economy was no longer viable.

However, the Indian people reject these positions promoted by the white society and have proposed a balanced economy with Indian participation pursued. Judge Thomas Berger, the Lysyk Inquiry and the Science Council of Canada have all agreed with this concept, he said.

The Indian people feel that there must be more public control of economic development if it is to benefit the residents of the Yukon. Webber further stated, that Indian people are not against development, but feel that there no longer is any reason why it should take place at the expense of Indian people, the natural environment, and at the expense of the future development options of the children.