

Importance of Regionals, Villages to AFN

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SPECIAL ESSAY ON THE "REGIONAL CORPORATION CONCEPT AND IT'S NECESSITY

1. BACKGROUND

Initially, as any organization emerges as an recognized entity, there is a background under which it began organization. It must be understood that in the early days of statehood for the State of Alaska, concerted efforts were made by it to select lands granted by the United States Congress. In the exercise of this procedure under the Statehood Act the State went to all corners of it's boundaries seeking lands for it's own.

It must also be remembered that at the time Alaska was purchased from Russia, a clause in that document conveying the Territory from Russia to the United States, states in part, that the Congress reserve to itself the authority to settle the rights of the Native people of Alaska, and again in the Statehood Act itself that any selection of land by the State is subject to any valid existing rights including those of the Natives of Alaska until the Congress acts to settle the rights theretofore dormant for the last ninety one years.

Under the two documents purporting to protect the rights of the Native people, we as Natives, felt assured that no one, not certainly our own State, would step all over us in the process of their selec-

tion. In the midst of the quiet operation of the State, and I am not exactly sure that all selections were made with proper notification, we became aware of where the selections were being made. Periodically, screams of "tresspass" and you are "taking our land" were voiced from different quarters of the State. However, all screams fell on deaf ears and the selections continued and progressed without even once stopping to see who they were stepping on.

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Regional Organizational Integral Parts of AFN

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Quite suddenly then, we realized that unless we officially file protests of the selections on what we considered as "our land" nothing was going to stop. While our filing of the protests did not in themselves stop all selections, the interpretation of our protests in some departments began to take effect. It slowed down the approval or the actions necessary to grant title to applicants.

It must be emphasized here that many individuals, attorneys, as well as outspoken laymen, sympathetic to our claims took an unpopular stand in support of them and until that time we were at the mercy of the aggressiveness of the State in its selections, ignoring squatters in some cases, villages in others, and actual land claims by the regional associations.

2. REGIONALS AND LAND CLAIMS

Thus the Regional associations began playing a real part in the whole Land Claims to its present status as, the organizations comprising the Alaska Federation of Natives itself. Without the Regional associations we have no AFN.

With the exception of a few villages in isolated cases where claims were filed for reasons other than land claims, all land claims were filed by the regional associations. The desire to form a single voice with the hope of gaining stature to attain congressional recognition, and this, it has most effectively gained.

A simple example in the case of the Arctic Slope Native Association is very much in order. It would have been a futile effort if Barrow alone were to have filed a claim of the North Slope. Wainwright village could not have had more effect if it had done so on its own. Likewise with Pt. Hope, Barter Island and Anaktuvuk Pass because we could not have, without incurring much time and money that we didn't have, to arrive at reasonable boundaries of our claims by villages.

Referring back to history which was testified to by Mr. Alfred Hopson, Mr. Simon Paneak and myself with others, a great trade movement involved travel from Pt. Hope to the Canadian border, and west from Barter Island through Barrow to Pt. Hope. All of the region on the North Slope has been used and occupied by the Eskimo people.

The feeling of relationship of the people to its land has been shared since time immemorial. Here is truly an ethnic group, sharing among others, the very pattern of life so identical, speaking the same basic language, hunting the same species of animals, having the same frame of mind, progressive, loving and God fearing.

In the application of procedures set out in S.1830 proposing a single statewide corporation to administer the judgment funds and land, there is no assurance that Barrow would receive adequate attention to its programs and needs for assistance. Likewise and more so with Pt. Hope and the other villages in the North Slope. While Barrow tends to be more reliant on its own representation, the other villages within the region on the other hand tend to rely on the leadership of Barrow. So then, the only sure way our neighbors feel they can receive adequate attention for their needs is to work through the regional headquarters in Barrow.

In going over the needed programs for Wainwright, let us assume as an example, that a ten point program was submitted to the Statewide corporation. Let us also assume that the other two hundred villages submitted ten point programs, and take into consideration that the nine man board would attempt to screen these programs, with no assurance that the regional associations would be represented, much less the important villages who are actually the back bone of the Statewide organization. Who can tell me that of the two thousand requests for assistance Barrow might receive some attention on the first go round, or maybe the second, perhaps the third, or if you really want to be fair about this we'll consider Barrow at our next session. This is the situation we are facing.

Unless we adopt some procedure whereby all local applicants can be screened at the regional level, and present them by regions, there is no hope that we can give adequate attention to our local people.

The actual procedure then would be:

1. Each village would make program proposals to their regional headquarters.
2. The regionals, having representation from villages within it, makes deletions, additions to local needs, and approve and disapprove.
3. Having recommendations from all the villages in the re-

gion, then come up with a package of proposals for proper presentation to the statewide corporation.

4. The regional then having the delegated authority to negotiate, sits down as a statewide corporation and bargains in hopes of gaining approval.

5. The regional then come back from a statewide session and hand to the locals all the programs approved and complete the whole process.

3. ANALYSIS:

It relieves the statewide nine-man board from dealing with all 225 villages which is desirable.

There is no other way the villages want to operate anyway. If it were so, we would have had 225 separate land claims. The utilization of the regional concept has been used in the effective organization of the Alaska Federation of Natives.

To do otherwise would be disastrous because no one would know where to start from and as many as five years could be lost in the proper administration of any judgment funds and land.

I might add in conclusion, that contrary to a Department of Interior report saying in effect that it is not necessary to have a majority of Native people on the statewide board, I feel very strongly that the natives should have majority on the board. A mixed composition is, however, desirable because it would tend to give a check and balance while not materially effecting the wishes of the Natives. The same holds true in any democratic government and I need not go into that extensively.

It is also my hope that the membership in the statewide organization as is in S-1830 would be enlarged as to reflect a representative from each regional corporation.

Thus concludes my personal thoughts on the need for the regional corporations.

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(This may be used in any way helpful to further the cause of all Alaskans particularly the Native people.)