

AFN WASH. OFFICE NECESSITY

Notti, Borbridge See Office as Advancement For Land Claims Work

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WASHINGTON, (Special)—Emil Notti, president of the Alaska Federation of Natives, and John Borbridge, Jr., president of the Tlingit and Haida Central Council, arrived in Washington, D.C., this week to represent Alaska natives in pursuing land claims legislation.

Notti, who came with his family to Washington Wednesday, plans to spend six months or "as long as necessary" in representing the native position in land legislation.

The decision to open the Washington office was announced by Notti October 4. He termed the move as a "long needed" and necessary effort.

AFN has no office space in the capitol yet. The Association on American Indian Affairs and Arthur Lazarus, the A.A.I.A. general counsel, are currently seeking space for Notti and Borbridge.

The Washington representation was largely made possible through the A.A.I.A., which loaned the Alaska Federation of

Natives \$35 thousand for that purpose.

The other group instrumental in sending the native leaders to Washington is the Tlingit and Haida Central Council, from which Borbridge is "on loan."

Until the office space can be obtained, the native leaders are working through the offices of legal counsel.

Since the Alaska tour of the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, the AFN lawyers in Washington have been preparing for the arrival of Notti and Borbridge.

Attorney Bill Iverson, of the Goldberg firm, told the Tundra Times that there have been no real developments since the House Committee tour.

Iverson said the firm, which is general counsel for the AFN, has been occupied in meetings with the staff of senators and representatives from the Interior committees of both houses.

Through these meetings, the AFN counsel has been establishing a schedule of appointments for the native leaders with the congressmen.

Borbridge said that initially, he and Notti would be doing a "follow-up" on the House tour. They will answer questions and pursue points advocated by native interests while the issue is still fresh in the minds of the

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AFN D.C. Office . .

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representatives, Borbridge stated.

Through the expansion of the AFN office in Anchorage and the opening of the Washington office, Borbridge said the AFN would enlarge its effort to "advance and fight for our rights."

Both Notti and Borbridge say the land claims issue has become a national one and they will try to keep it that way. They do admit, however, that "we have a great deal to contend with."

The leaders decline to define their role as that of lobbying. They merely say that Alaska natives have become more aggressive in pursuing the land issue and that they, the leadership, will work to educate the congressmen to the position advocated by Alaska natives.

Many of those in Washington, sympathetic to the native position on land legislation, say their hopes for a favorable solution have increased to the point of optimism.

Recently, there has been some fear that the bill authorized by the Alaska Federation of Natives would be badly received in the House. How much of the AFN bill is accepted, it is widely felt, is largely dependent on the House Interior Committee and how quickly that committee begins acting on the native claims legislation.

One source, which has long been involved with the native claims, told the Tundra Times that, after meeting briefly with House Interior Chairman Aspinall this week, he is confident that the House will begin to move by spring.

Action on the Senate side, previously expected to begin this week in the Senate Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, has been postponed due to the absence of Sen. Lee Metcalf (D-Montana) who is currently in Europe.

It is now felt that the Senate Interior Committee will begin its mark-up sessions on the land claims bill by the week of Nov. 9.

The AFN leaders feel this delay may more fully allow them

to pursue the native position. They view the tour by the House Interior Committee earlier this month as an indication of budding national interest in the "legality and justice" of the position advocated by the AFN.

John Borbridge said that, because of the tour and the land hearings, the congressmen are now "highly approachable" and "interested in learning about the new state."

With the opening of the Washington office, expansion of efforts on the "home front" have also come about. AFN leaders say that their hope is not only to bring about increased awareness of the issue among Alaska natives, but also to educate the state and its public officials to the native position.

The significance of this, it is thought, can be immeasurably huge, especially with major state elections in the near future.