

No Significant Disadvantages—

If Arctic Slope Villages Incorporate Under I.R.A.

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WASHINGTON, D.C.—Should Arctic Slope Eskimo villages vote to organize as a corporation under the Indian Reorganization Act on August 26, they would acquire no significant disadvantages upon achieving that status according to Interior Department attorney Bob Bruce.

Permission for the Eskimo villages of Point Hope, Barrow, Kaktovik, Wainwright, Point Lay and Anaktuvuk Pass, to hold elections August 26 on whether or not to become an I.R.A. corporation has been granted by the Interior Department.

Bruce, who is assigned to the Bureau of Indian Affairs and has drafted most of the legislation proposed by the Administration to settle the Alaska Native land claims, told the Tundra Times that I.R.A. corporate status is a means of extending federal recognition to tribal groups.

Not all Arctic Slope villages

were allowed to proceed in seeking corporate status, he said, because not all Arctic Slope villages are recognized as belonging to the same tribal group.

Due to that limitation, the proposed corporation would not

qualify as a regional corporation under any proposed land claims legislation.

Bruce stated that there are advantages, and that he knew of no disadvantages to the special

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Slope Incorporation . . .

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I.R.A. status.

A governing tribal agency and a governing document would result if the villages voted to accept the proposed constitution.

Control of tribal affairs and funds received under pending land claims legislation could be achieved by the incorporating villages. The tribal corporation itself could become eligible to receive revenues and benefits which might otherwise go to individual villages.

Grants and loans currently available to Arctic Slope villages would not be increased by the creation of the proposed organization, Bruce noted.

In general, he added, a measure of flexibility would be afforded the members of the Eskimo tribal group if they decided to become an I.R.A. corporation.

One Washington attorney with considerable experience in Indian affairs expressed fear that, considering existing incorporated municipalities and villages

and corporations formed subsequent to a land claims settlement, Alaska Natives would be forced into the position of dealing with too many organizational structures.

Duplicity of corporate function, no increase in taxation or loan benefits, increased diversion of energies, an increase in the number of administrators required and inflated payroll responsibilities, and a duplicity of regional organizations were among the list of disadvantages which he enumerated.

Another attorney, Guy Martin of Congressman Begich's office, researched the provisions of the Indian Reorganization Act. He envisioned no serious drawbacks to the proposed corporation.

The regulations placed upon I.R.A. corporations by the Interior Department is the uncertain factor, Martin said.

The I.R.A. corporate avenue has generally been used by "lower forty-eight" tribal groups as a vehicle to acquire federally organized corporate powers. Over 20 Alaskan villages have come under I.R.A. Many of them later abandoned I.R.A. status to become fourth class cities.

Speculation is offered here that, should the Arctic Slope villages vote to adopt the organization, and if they view pending land claims legislation as unsatisfactory to them, they may be in a position to pursue a course separate from that of the Alaska Federation of Natives in seeking a land claims settlement.

There is no consensus among Washington observers with regard to the significance of the proposed action. Some feel that it will facilitate self-determination for the Eskimos of Arctic Slope villages. Others fear that a wighty Native bureaucracy will result.