

Borbridge Reports About Hickel Hearing

REPORT BY JOHN BORBRIDGE TO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
AND DELEGATES OF THE CENTRAL COUNCIL OF
THE TLINGIT AND HAIDA INDIANS OF ALASKA

**NEW PROTECTION FOR NATIVE LAND CLAIMS. THREAT TO
NATIVE LANDS AND LAND RIGHTS HALTED.**

"What Udall can do by executive order, I can undo."

These words were spoken by Governor Hickel just after his nomination to be Secretary of the Interior.

The order to which Governor Hickel referred was issued by Secretary Udall at the urging of the Alaska Native leadership to

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suspend further dissipation of Native lands and erosion of their land rights.

At this moment the State of Alaska has selected about 20 million acres of land, much of which is claimed by Native groups. Also, private companies have applied for federal mineral leases on an additional 5 to 10 million acres. If Secretary Udall's order were to be "undone" by the new Secretary of the Interior, these 20 million acres of valuable mineral lands could be patented to the State and the mineral leases could be approved despite the claims and the protests of the Native groups.

In the light of Governor Hickel's statements and actions opposing any delay in giving title to the State, the Alaska Native leaders considered that the Native land claims were in very great danger of being, in the words of Governor Hickel himself, "irretrievably lost" to the Alaska Natives.

The Native leaders believed that the most effective way to safeguard the Native land claims was to secure from Governor Hickel, reliable assurance that, as Secretary of the Interior, he would protect the Native-claimed lands from further disposition until Congress had a chance to settle the entire Native land claims question.

To accomplish this, an open letter was delivered to Secretary of the Interior-designate Hickel, asking him a series of questions about his attitudes and intentions as to Native land claims.

Also, the Alaska Native leaders made a trip to Washington, D.C. and met with members of Congress, particularly members of the Senate Committee of Interior and Insular Affairs, which was about to hold hearings on the confirmation of Governor Hickel as Secretary of the Interior. This Committee will also lead in the determination of the final solution of the Native land claims.

At these meetings with the several Senators the Alaska Native leaders explained the dangers threatening the Native land claims and suggested measures to safeguard against these dangers. Written materials were prepared and provided to the Senators.

I am happy to report to you that these efforts have met with substantial success. After close questioning of Governor Hickel as to his attitudes and intentions concerning Native land claims and disposition of Native-claimed lands, the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs secured from Secretary of the Interior-designate Hickel a firm pledge that, as Secretary of the Interior, he would take no actions to lift the land freeze or otherwise change the status quo until Congress has an opportunity to act on the problem during the 91st Congress.

If it appears necessary to modify the freeze in order to serve essential public purposes, such as roads and airports, Mr. Hickel agreed to consult with the Senate Committee in each case to obtain the committee's approval.

In turn, Senator Jackson, as Chairman of the Committee, and Senator Allott, the ranking Republican member of the Committee, pledged their best efforts to assure that legislation will be enacted in the current session of Congress to settle the Native land claims. Senator Jackson expects to hold hearings on such legislation in the next month or two.

On the basis of foregoing pledges, which were publicly made in open hearing, the Alaska Native leaders gave their endorsement to Mr. Hickel for Secretary of the Interior.

I believe that the efforts of your leaders were primarily responsible for these favorable results. I also believe that this dramatic and far-reaching victory will become a significant organizational effort. All of us can now concentrate on achieving a prompt and a fair and equitable settlement without the continuing threat of further losses of lands.

We have the pledges of both the Secretary of the Interior and of the Senate Committee that they will do all they can to expedite a just and equitable solution of the Native land claims.

There will be much for us to do in the coming months to secure a just settlement. With the cooperation of the Congressional Committees and the Secretary of the Interior, we think we now have a reasonable basis for hope that we will succeed.

The following appeared in the Anchorage Daily News, Saturday, January 18, 1969.

"**MAINTENANCE** of the freeze represents a tremendous tactical victory for the four man delegation of the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) that came to Washington last Wednesday seeking "clarification" of Hickel's position on the matter before proceeding with an AFN endorsement of the governor. Against tremendous pressure, the group....AFN president Emil Notti, and board members John Borbridge, Eben Hopson, and State Rep. Willie Hensley held out, visiting various members of the committee and consulting with their attorneys.

Friday, after Hickel's commitment was obtained, Notti and the other members of the delegation took the stand and endorsed the governor's confirmation."