

State Land Suit Money Bill Passes House

Legislation to provide \$44,600 for the State's land claims suit passed the House 23-16 Wednesday.

John Sackett of Huslia joined the Democratic opposition in what was otherwise a straight party vote.

The State's suit seeks to have the Department of the Interior grant patent on selections of land under the Statehood Act, even though Native land claims have been filed on the land.

Democrats William J. Moran of Anchorage and William Hensley of Kotzebue argued

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that the suit was preventing action on the claims by Congress.

"The governor is trying to litigate something which everyone concedes will ultimately require Congressional action, and there is no better way to delay such action than to simply say that the matter is before the court," said Moran.

Hensley said, "We do not feel that the state is working for our interests and we hope this suit will be withdrawn."

House majority leader Ted Stevens defended the administration, saying that the Governor was using the only vehicle he had to resolve the apparent conflict between State land selection and guaranteed native land rights in the Statehood Act.

Before final passage, the House turned down by a 17-22 vote an amendment to appropriate \$25,000 to the Alaska Federation of Native Associations for the litigation of their own land claims.

In offering the amendment, Rep. Tom Balone, D-Nome said "if the State had not entered into this law suit, the Natives could have gone directly to Congress for protection of their claims.

"But because of this suit the Native people now must intervene and spend a great deal of money which they do not have to protect their interests."

Stevens argued that it would be unconstitutional for the State to appropriate public money for a private purpose, no matter how valid. He suggested that the Native groups get legal counsel through the Department of the Interior.