

*I may not agree with a word you say but I will defend unto death your right to say it. Voltaire*

## **Other Voices—**

### **● Task Force Bills Offer A Practical Solution**

The future development of Alaska and an equitable settlement of the native land claims issue are intrinsically linked. Until the protests are resolved, the development of vast amounts of land will be hindered. Further, until a successful attack on native poverty is made, whatever future prosperity the state may see will be blemished.

The Task Force bills, Senate Bill 2906 and the identical House of Representatives bill 15049, offer the advantage, to all groups concerned, of a quick settlement and promise to aid in the social and economic development of Alaska's native population.

The bills propose, in essence, to grant 40 million acres of federal land to native corporations in the state, a 10 per cent royalty on all revenues from the outer continental shelf with an immediate advance of \$20 million, and surface rights for 100 years to lands now occupied and used by native groups. A companion state bill, to be introduced, would grant a 5 per cent royalty on future revenues from state land acquired after enactment of the bill.

The solution offered by the Task Force bills would avoid court action, which could drag into the 21st century. Such an occurrence would not only be unfair to Alaska's present native population but would greatly hamper development on the protested lands. If we are to judge from past court decisions, it is likely that natives would receive a paltry amount as an end result.

Putting land in the hands of natives, on the other hand, would aid the development of the state. Reportedly, the oil companies interested in Alaska would be just as happy to deal with native corporations as with anyone else. The Task Force bills put the land in native control, not in the control of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Those who argue the state and federal governments owe nothing to the natives speak from the 19th Century and have not learned the lessons of the 20th Century. One of the most urgent problems facing the entire nation today is that of minority groups which have been unequitably dealt with in the past and are now unable to take their place as productive members of the community. Society eventually must face up to its shabby dealings with non-white groups. Alaska's natives must not be put in the ranks of the permanently disinherited and impoverished.

Although there is not complete agreement, the Task Force bills are acceptable to many native groups. Most feel that land ownership is important and that they must have control of their own property. Rather than wait years for the possibility that a court decision would grant them more benefits than the proposed bills, they are willing to accept this compromise.

It is vital to Alaska that this issue be settled as promptly as possible. We urge that the Task Force bills, or some modification thereof, be enacted by Congress and the State Legislature this year.

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