

Asks Quick Reversal—

Food Stamp Cutoff

ANCHORAGE — Senator Mike Gravel (Democrat-Alaska) today urged "quick reversal" of an Agriculture Department decision to reduce or cut off food stamps for any Natives who receive payments under the Claims Settlement Act.

In a letter to Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz, Senator Gravel stated that "it was not the intention of Congress to have these payments considered as personal income in deciding eligibility for various government benefit programs."

Gravel, a long-time critic of Administration food policy and last year's wheat deal with Russia, said today that the Agriculture decision "smacks of the same disregard for the middle- and lower-income citizens that we all saw so clearly in the Soviet grain exports."

"I had hoped that the Administration learned its lesson last year, and that the fleecing of the U. S. consumer had reached an end," said the Senator. "But this latest action is a clear indication that those most in need will be the first to suffer whenever Mr. Butz and Mr. Nixon attempt to 'balance the budget'."

Citing another decision by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Senator Gravel argued that Claims payments are not taken into account when establishing eligibility for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits or for Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Both the SSI and AFDC

programs are administered by HEW.

In Anchorage today, Senator Gravel said that "The Alaska Native Fund was to be recognized as a payment by the government for certain lands — nothing else."

"The Agriculture decision, if it is not reversed, will work a great hardship on those who can least afford it: those Natives at the lower end of the economic ladder," declared the Senator. "I'm particularly worried about the many who cannot obtain steady employment."

The Senator also noted that many State-run welfare programs do not count payments from the Native Fund in providing Assistance to eligible recipients.