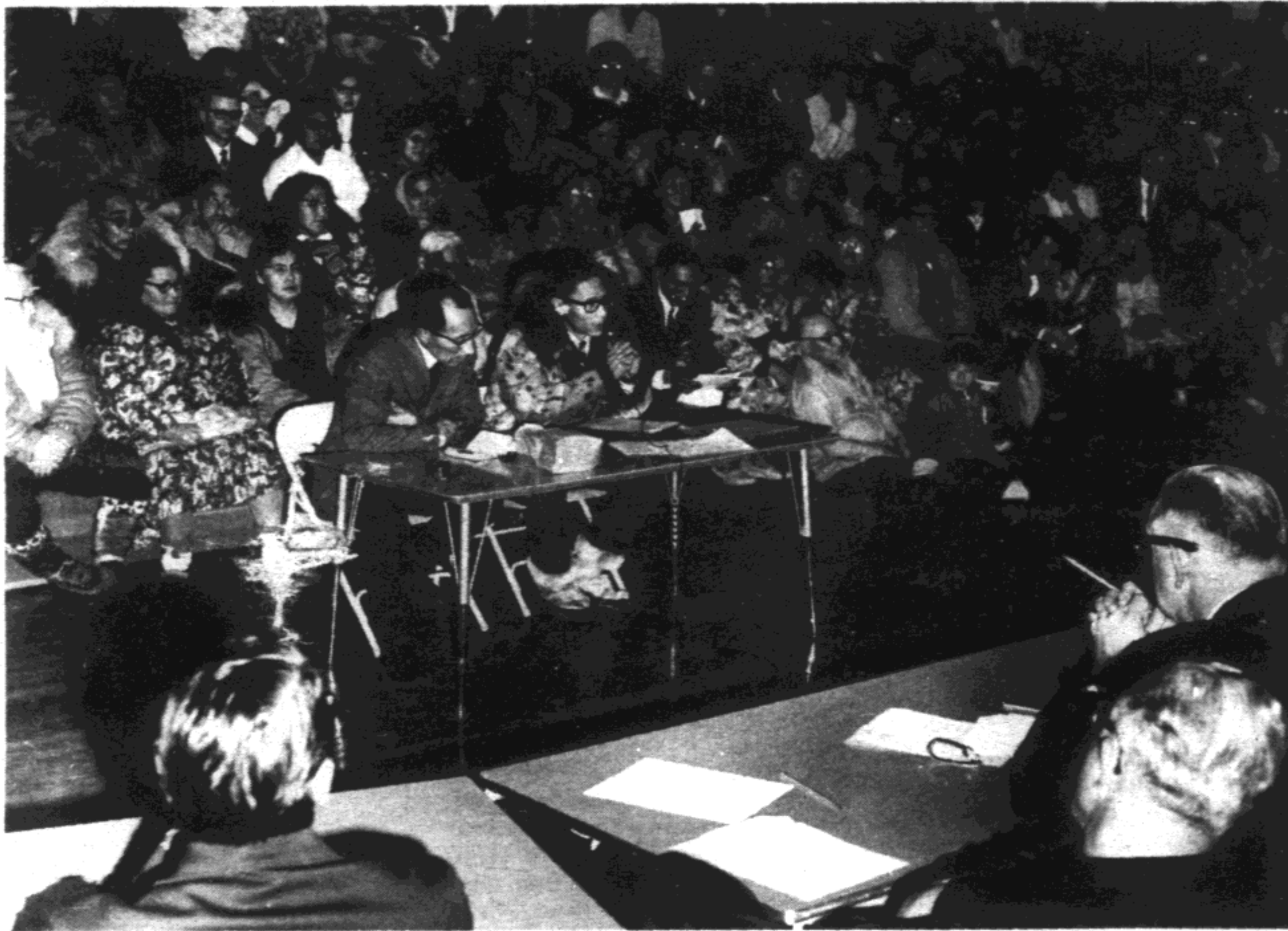


HOUSE TOUR EVOKES MISGIVINGS



BARROW ESKIMO AUDIENCE—Great interest among the Barrow Eskimos was generated when congressmen of the U.S. House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs held reviews of statements for the committee hearing on land claims this morning and throughout the day in Fair-

banks. At the table in the center is Joseph Upicksoun speaking on the microphone. At his right is Eben Hopson, executive director of ASNA. Three congressmen are listening in the foreground.

—DAVID S. FAUSKE Photograph

Abbreviated Meets with Natives Pinned on Poor Plans by House Group

By THOMAS RICHARDS, JR.
Staff Writer

The House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, on a whirlwind, one-week tour through Alaska, has begun hearings in Fairbanks this morning before concluding its trip tomorrow in Anchorage.

The committee began its Alaska tour Sunday with brief stops at Annette Island and Sitka.

As it was through most of the field hearings, the committee was behind schedule as it arrived in Sitka Sunday afternoon.

The congressmen, many of them accompanied by their wives, rushed their lunch at Mt. Edgecumbe High School and allotted 15 minutes for a first hand look at Sitka's native village.

Following the hasty tour, the members of the House Interior Committee and House Subcommittee on Indian Affairs listened to presentations at the Alaska Native Brotherhood hall in the Southeast Alaska town.

Frank Kitka, 80 year old Tlingit Indian from Sitka, explained to the congressmen how his people used and occupied the forests, fishing on the rivers and the sea.

Ester Littlefield, a direct descendant of Chief Katlian who figured prominently in early Sitka history at the time the Russians arrived in Alaska, also addressed the committee.

"The money made from the

land should be used to benefit our people," Mrs. Littlefield stated.

"We should be getting benefits from the sea, from the rivers, and from the forests. It all belonged to us. Now we can't touch it.

"It is making criminals of us," she added.

Much to the disappointment of many of the older natives, and to others who had taken time to prepare presentations, the committee members indicated that they could not allow themselves time to listen to anyone else.

These brief stops were to become typical of the committee's tour. Several stops on the tour were eliminated completely.

It was felt by many natives that little justice could be expected from the congressmen if the limitations which they forced upon themselves were any indication of the respect they held for the native position.

One Sitka Indian was moved to comment: "They didn't allow enough time to have our people

(Continued on page 6)

Congressmen . . .

(Continued from page 1)

tell it like it was. We were intent on explaining this to them. Now it looks kind of bleak. I suppose this is how little they respect our claim."

After cutting the Sitka stop short, the committee lengthened their flight to Juneau in order to fly over glaciers and to take in other scenery.

Asked to comment on initial impressions of Alaskan Natives, one member of the entourage said, "I was so impressed at how nicely dressed and how clean the people were."

Somewhat more time was given for the Juneau portion of the Alaska trip, where the congressmen arrived Sunday sporting Tlingit Power buttons which were presented to them on their departure from Sitka.

The Tlingit Indians in Juneau were at first angered with the committee's schedule, which called for a 45 minute presentation Monday morning following a 2 hour cocktail party at the Governor's mansion Sunday evening.

They felt that Governor Miller and state officials would have 2 hours to voice their strong opposition to native land claims, while the natives would only have 45 minutes at most to respond.

The Tlingits were quick to challenge the prohibitive schedule and invited the congressmen to a dinner, hosted by the Tlingit and Haida Council in the Gold Room of the Baronof Hotel Sunday evening, as well as a coffee hour the following morning.

Both informally at the dinner, and not so informally at the coffee hour, at which time Chairman Wayne Aspinall actively questioned whether natives had any right to lands in Southeastern Alaska, the natives explained their position.

The native position was both explained and defended by such Indians as Bob Loescher and Carl Nelson, newly elected Juneau city councilmen, Dr. Walter Soboleff, Grand President of the Alaska Native Brotherhood, Jim Austin, president of the Juneau ANB Camp, Richard Stitt, Director of the Southeast Alaska Community Action Program, and John Borbridge, Jr., president of the Tlingit and Haida Central Council.

Late Monday morning, the congressmen left Juneau, flew over Yakutat, and landed in Anchorage. From Anchorage, they were to fly to Kenai and to the village of Tyonek.

The Tyonek natives received revenues from oil reserves discovered five years ago on the Indian reservation. The tour of the village was intended to display to the congressmen how Indians could competently manage money.

Due to weather conditions, and because the schedule did not allow the committee to wait on the weather, the tour was cancelled.

The committee over-nighted in Anchorage, and Tuesday, flew to Dillingham, Bethel and Nome. At Dillingham, the congressmen made their half-hour stop and made a brief tour of the town.

They allowed themselves more time in Bethel, the largest Eskimo town in Southeast Alaska, so

that they could meet with the townspeople.

The congressmen asked several questions. They asked for a show of hands from those familiar with the land claims bill as proposed by the Alaska Federation of Natives and approximately 25 responded.

The congressmen asked how many of these 25 were in agreement with the AFN bill. The tally revealed only seven.

To the surprise of the congressmen, most of whom are astonished at the amount of land claimed by AFN, they learned the only objection by natives to the AFN position was that there wasn't enough land claimed.

Leaving Bethel, the committee flew to Nome where they toured the King Island village and spent Tuesday night.

Wednesday, the congressmen boarded their Air Force C-130 and flew to Barrow.

Flying into Barrow Wednesday afternoon, the committee was greeted by Eben Hopson, Executive Director of the Arctic Slope Native Association; Joe Upicksoun, first vice-president of ASNA, and other north slope Eskimos.

After viewing the town, the congressmen were guests of ASNA at a dinner which was followed with Eskimo dances and presentations by Eskimo spokesmen.

Thursday morning, the committee remained on the north slope to inspect drilling rigs at Prudhoe Bay. On this portion of the tour, as well as the Kenai trip, the congressmen were hosted by oil companies.

Thursday afternoon, the congressmen arrived in Fairbanks. Yesterday evening, they attended a reception held in their honor and hosted by the Fairbanks Native Association, the Arctic Slope Native Association, and the Tanana Chiefs Conference.

As the committee began hearings today in Fairbanks, most native observers were reluctant to evaluate the tour, although they are somewhat disappointed that the schedule did not permit as comprehensive exposure to the broad spectrum of native opinion as possible.

There is, however, a note of cautious optimism.

Emil Notti, president of the Alaska Federation of Natives stated, "I hope that from what they have observed, the committee will see the AFN position is reasonable, justifiable, and thoughtfully put together, and deserves their consideration."

"We think that it is in the best interest of the parties in that the bill moves this year," Notti added.

It may be too early to evaluate the committee's tour; it may be even too early to judge the efforts in selling the AFN land claims position. Yet one thing is certain.

The Alaska Native Land Claims will be the final episode the United States will see in dealing with native Americans, and not until the land legislation has been signed by the President of the United States will it be known whether justice has been rendered.