

AFN STANDS FIRM ON CLAIMS

'When the Cause Is Just And We Are Right, Who Should Compromise?'

By SUSAN TAYLOR
Staff Writer

THE BOARD OF Directors of the Alaska Federation of Natives stood firm on its land claims position at a three-day meeting in Anchorage last week.

"When the cause is just and we are right, then who should compromise?" asked John Borbridge, first vice-president of the federation, as he discussed the meeting.

President of the AFN, Emil Notti, could not be reached for comment.

Similarly, Alfred Ketzler, acting executive director of the AFN, emphasized that the board reaffirmed its land claims stand and adopted no fallback position.

Thus the federation will continue to request a settlement of 40 million acres, \$500 million in cash, and a 2 per cent overriding royalty on oil and gas leases.

KETZLER HAS temporarily moved up from the position of deputy director to fill the top post while Willie Hensley, a state representative from Kotzebue, attends the current session of the state legislature.

"Experience tells us," Borbridge said, "that the bill that ultimately comes out will be different from what we, the interior department, and the governor are seeking."

But, he explained, the bill can be influenced at many points as it goes through the legislative process.

And at each of these points, AFN lobbyists will be working to see that their voices are heard and their influence felt as much as possible.

Held in the Kaloa Building in Anchorage on Jan. 8, 9, and 10, the meeting drew 19 of the 26 board members to the conference room.

IN THIS ROOM, the question of establishing priorities which the AFN would stand by in a negotiated settlement was raised by several board members.

However, no discussion or action followed when other board members opposed such discussion.

One member expressed disappointment that priorities were not brought out.

In the area of lobbying efforts, the board concerned itself not only with a report of past actions, but with plans for the upcoming months.

About five AFN representatives have been working in Washington and will continue to do so

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THE PAUSE—During coffee break, Jerome Trigg, left, and Jerry Ivey, center, stopped to discuss the claims issue. Third man not identified.

—Photos by SHOWALTER SMITH

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until a bill is passed.

In addition, the organization hopes to expand its efforts and to open an office there, depending on financial resources, Borbridge said.

As the Washington effort grows, the vice-president continued, the AFN plans to reach organizations all over the United States that would have a natural sympathy for the natives cause and to encourage them to write their own Congressional representatives.

MEANWHILE, the AFN holds as a top priority, the continuation of the effort in the villages of Alaska, Borbridge said.

The Washington campaign will be tough, he continued, because the land claims issue is a unique situation and Alaska is a unique state—both making it difficult for members of the House and Senate to appreciate the complexity of the situation and the reasonableness of the proposal of the natives.

"It is difficult for a Congressman from a small state to realize the reasonableness of the natives' request for 40 million acres."

"Above all, it is difficult for the representatives to appreciate the depth of feeling and strong determination of the natives."

MENTIONING that the bill can be influenced in the Senate committee (where it now is), on the House floor, and then in the House-Senate compromise committee, Borbridge stressed that the AFN must obtain all the support it can all along this route.

As the federation goes to the villages and the nation seeking for its proposal, it will also seek the financial aid necessary to carry out the effort.

Some mention has been made that the State legislature might consider appropriating money for the settlement of the land claims issue.

On this matter, an AFN spokesman said that the federation has no plans for action if such legislation is introduced.

But, the organization will be following the matter closely and will act if necessary.

OTHER CONCERNS of the

board centered around internal affairs of the AFN.

Both Borbridge and Ketzler seemed to feel that the board members had successfully risen to meet the challenge of a ever-growing organization.

"I feel that a lot of the board members went away from the meeting with a better understanding of the day-to-day operations of the federation and should be able to answer questions on these matters raised by their constituents," Ketzler said.

Borbridge saw this concern for in-house matters as an example of the changing nature of the board.

Before now, he explained, the board has had to respond only to emergencies such as the land claims issue, but now it is assuming a more sophisticated, more complex, and more responsible rule.

The AFN, he continued, is becoming a part of big business and thus must become immersed in the details of its in-house organization.

WHILE GROWING programs and responsibilities are, on the one-hand, beneficial they, on the other hand present a danger to the federation—that danger being that the organization, as it grows in numbers and power, will grow away from the people who are its reason for being.

According to Borbridge, as the AFN accepts more responsibility, it must make sure that the people retain a sense of identity and participation with it "so that we grow together and not apart."

And, if the people and the organization grow apart, the vice-president said, the programs would fail due to a lack of support.

Thus, he continued, the role of the board member as he informs his constituents is most important.

"We must be sure that the people are charting the way with us," he stressed.

Ideally, he continued, the regional representative would attend the board meeting where he would obtain information and

printed material. Then in his regional office, he would duplicate the material and send it out to the villages. The villages would have a meeting and then feed back information to the regional representative and finally to the AFN board of directors.

IN REALITY, Borbridge said, the regions do not have the funds with which to duplicate material and the representatives do not have the time to visit each village in their region.

There are over 200 small villages in the state, he stressed.

While the total figure for AFN grants is impressive, the vice-president said, much of this money has been earmarked and can not be used for the regional organizations.

As discussed at the board meeting, the AFN is applying for a Ford Economic Study Grant.

The money would be used to hire professional expertise for a study of what the AFN should do with any settlement resulting from the passage of a land claims bill in Congress.

PRESENT AT THE meeting were: Emil Notti, president; John Borbridge, first vice-president; Eben Hopson, second vice-president; Flore Lekanof, Aleut League; Jerome Trigg, Arctic Native Brotherhood; Joe Upickson, Arctic Slope Native Association; Cecil Barnes, Chugach Native Association; Don Wright, Cook Inlet Native Association;

Roy Ewan Copper River Indian Association; Sam Kito, Fairbanks Native Association; George Miller, Kenaitze Indian Association; Fred Bismark, Native Village of Tyonek; Willie Hensley, Executive Director of the AFN, George Ondola, Native Village of Eklutna;

Byron Mallott, Alaska Native Brotherhood; Alfred Ketzler, deputy director of AFN and Tanana Chiefs; James Thomas, Tlingit and Haida Indians; Gerald Ivey, Upper Kuskokwim Native Association; Phillip Guy, Alaska Village Council President.

Although no date has been set, Borbridge said, another meeting will be held before March 1.