Editorial—

A Respite from A Feverish Rush

At this point of the congressional lame duck session, it is quite dim that there will be an Alaska native land claims bill coming out of the U.S. House of Representatives. While keeping a wary eye for any eventuality, all those concerned with Alaska's land matters might as well sit back and start thinking of what to do when the new Congress convenes next year. It looks more and more each passing day that Congress will have to work on the claims bill in 1971.

The delay of the bill in the House, although agonizing to some, might turn out to be a blessing in disguise in the long run. It could be a beneficial respite from a feverish rush to settle the claims in one fell swoop no matter what during this session of Congress. The delay could have been a device to squash the pressure tactics that might have tended to cause injustices in the long run if the bill had been ramrodded through Congress. Some of the previsions in the land measure that might have bedazzled the senses may have been avoided by the delay of the bill.

The respite is also a most opportune time for the officials of the Alaska Federation of Natives to have a series of meetings and prepare to meet with the new William A. Egan administration in Juneau that is scheduled to take over the governing reins on December 7. Governor-elect Egan has already established a new amicable working level with the AFN. The opportunity is prime for a renewed effort which has the finest chance at last to approach the land solution with the unified effort. But first--the AFN has some homework to do.

There is a partial split the AFN is experiencing with the Arctic Slope Native Association at the moment. The crux of the matter is the distribution of lands as proposed by the statewide native group once the land claims settlement has been established.

We feel that ASNA has legitimate reasons for dissatisfaction with the AFN distribution plan. We also feel that the group is being arbitrary in its attempt to impose the plan. It seems to us that it was done as an easy way out of a more complex matter--the proper consideration of land uses as they apply in different native areas of the state. Land uses in the Arctic, as well as the northwestern and the Seward Peninsula areas, are uniquely different than other native areas of Alaska. Since they are, they bear special attention and consideration and AFN and its regional membership are the proper entities in which to thrash out the differences. Since this is a potentially complex undertaking, early preliminary meetings should be conducted and which should be followed by a general policy-making conference on land distribution.

There is a House delay on the native land claims bill. We are prone to view it as an interim in which a more unified effort of all concerned can be established toward solution of the great land problem. While this is being done, we hope that the Department of the Interior will continue to discharge its duties and protect the land solution effort into the year of 1971.