

'We Made No Deals In D.C.' - Hensley

State Rep. William Hensley and Emil Notti, president of the Alaska Federation of Natives, didn't wait for a formal invitation. They learned from a newspaper that U.S. Representative Howard Pollock had set up a U.S. Department of Interior briefing session in Washington, D.C. on the Alaska land bill for interested state leaders. They figured that meant them as well as Governor Walter Hickel, Edgar Boyko special legal counsel and Donald Burr, State attorney general. The Cook Inlet Natives Association quickly raised the money for travel expenses and the two native representa-

tives appeared unexpectedly at the first meeting, May 10 in Senator Bob Bartlett's Washington office.

"Though we were not formally invited, the federal officials had no choice but to explain the same facts to us as they were giving to the governor's party," Rep. Hensley stated. He and Notti spent eight days in Washington, gathering information on the proposed land bill from government officials. They conferred nearly an hour alone with Secretary of Interior Stewart Udall, and under Secretary Charles Luce "Udall was frank with us. He really discussed issues and didn't pull any punches," Hensley said.

"We are going to need a strong native federation that will have the resources to send observers and spokesmen to Washington, D.C. while the bill is under consideration," Hensley said.

Regional associations for their part, have to let their views be known on what kind of settlement they want.

The next four months will be critical ones if any bill is passed Hensley said. If action is delayed the land issue could become a gigantic political football during upcoming state and national elections.

"We made no agreements of any kind," while in Washington Hensley added. "We just wanted to be present to make sure no back handed deals were made."

Why the Native representatives were not formally invited remains a mystery. Representative Pollock had called the TUNDRA TIMES earlier to say he was going to confer with Notti about inviting Native representatives. But Notti never was contacted.

As the native claims bill now stands, its major points are:

To grant title to Native villages for land now occupied by their residents and for surrounding areas not exceeding 50,000 acres.

To grant 25-year permits for surface rights on hunting, fishing and trapping lands to be determined by the Interior Department.

To set up Court of Claims procedures for land not included in the village allotment with an 1867 date as jurisdictional basis for claims.