

NCAI SET TO BACK CLAIMS

Discussion on Claims Issue Scheduled for Thursday Afternoon

The National Congress of American Indians is expected to fully back the land claims position of Alaska's natives, according to James Thomas, public relations director of the organization.

A Tlingit Indian from Yakutat, Alaska, Thomas reported that Indian rights, including Alaska's land rights, are slated for discussion on Thursday.

Addressing the opening session of the convention Monday, Stevens urged Alaska's natives to support the Senate-passed land claims bill. It "represents the maximum benefits within the existing political framework in the Senate," he said.

However, Thomas said that remarks by Indian leaders after Stevens' speech indicated that the national congress will give its full support to whatever the Alaska natives want.

And the Alaska natives have consistently made it known that they want, not 10 million acres provided for in the Senate bill, but 40 million acres along with a 2 per cent overriding royalty and a \$500 million cash settlement.

If the delegates endorse the AFN land claims position, that item might become a top priority of the NCAI lobbying efforts.

in Washington.

Thomas said that the native land claims bill is important to all of the nation's natives because of the precedent which it could set for other tribes. Of particular concern is the termination of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, now called for in the Senate passed land claims bill.

The weeklong convention was opened Monday by president Earl Old Person from the Blackfeet tribe in Montana. As of Tuesday, Thomas reported that about 500 delegates had registered with more than 100 tribes represented. At least 1,000 delegates and visitors are expected.

NCAI represents about 600,000 Indians throughout the nation.

Monday afternoon was highlighted by a full dress parade of the delegates through downtown Anchorage. The route carried the Indians down C Street, past

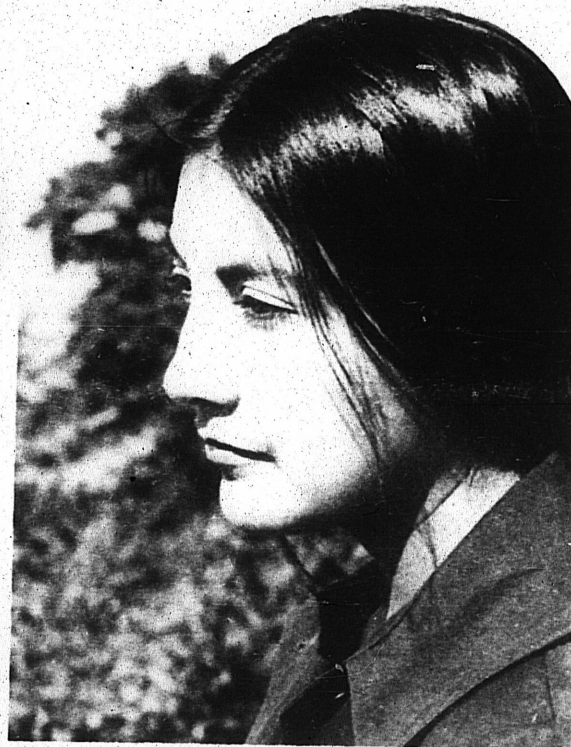
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NCAI PRESIDENT—Earl Old Person, president of the National Congress of American Indians, is leading the annual conference of the organization in Alaska for the first time.



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR—Bruce Wilkie, executive director of the NCAI, is attending business sessions of the organization.



MISS NCAI—Tina Manning, 20, is a charming Indian queen of the National Congress of American Indians, an organization that represents about 600,000 of her people. The beautiful young woman is from Owyhee, Nevada. Her father, Arthur Manning, is a well known Indian leader. Tina won her crown over 15 other contestants. She will be relinquishing her crown to her successor this Saturday in Anchorage. Tina is thrilled being in Alaska for the first time.

—Photos by JAMES THOMAS

NCAI Convention . . .

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the Tyonek Building to honor the Tyonek Indians, and out to the Anchorage Sports Arena.

"It was great," said Thomas as he explained that the parade line ran for about 10 blocks and streets were lined all along the route with onlookers.

Never before has Anchorage seen a parade like that one, he added.

The first convention day concluded with a potlatch. Every imaginable Alaskan native food could be found there, Thomas said.

The schedule for Tuesday included discussions on Indian youth, Indian education and Indian graduate students, followed by the queen pageant in the Anchorage Sports Arena. All of the business sessions are being held in the Anchorage Westward

with the evening events moving to the Sports Arena.

Interior Secretary Walter J. Hickel is scheduled to address a luncheon meeting of convention at noon on Wednesday.

Convention spokesmen are still hopeful that Vice President Spiro Agnew will address the delegates but, at the paper deadline, there was no confirmation.

Wednesday afternoon, a major issue—Indian rights in the lower 48—will come up for discussion. Of particular interest is the Pyramid Lake situation.

The lake is within the Paiute Reservation in Nevada, but its water sources are being diverted by the Bureau of Reclamation into nearby urban areas. As a result, Thomas said, the once beautiful lake has been drained of 80 feet and is becoming stagnant.

The issue is a thorn in the side of any Secretary of the Interior, he added. For while he is responsible for the Bureau of Reclamation, which has the right to take the water, he is also responsible for the Bureau of Indian Affairs which is supposed to protect Indian rights.

Due to the resulting confusion, the Paiutes are now suing the Interior Department.

Legal advisor in the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bill Veeder, who is considered the nation's leading expert on water rights, is scheduled to be a panel member for the water rights discussion.

On Thursday, the delegates will discuss, in addition to treaty and land rights, taxation, tax exempt status, economic development and land power.

Other possible discussion topics are the Washington State Indian problems dealing with fishing rights and shootings and tear gassing by police in that State.

A windup session will be held Friday followed by a traditional dance competition that night. The convention will close Saturday night with the selection of finalists in queen, olympic, dance group, and individual dancer contests.

The 27th annual convention has been coordinated by Donald R. Wright, newly elected president of the AFN and regional vice president of the NCAI. Many of the 500 delegates to the AFN convention in Anchorage last weekend stayed over for the NCAI convention.

Also, assisting with the convention is Bruce Wilkie, executive director of the nationwide organization. Wilkie is a Makah of the Makah tribe at the tip of the Olympic Peninsula in the State of Washington.