

NO HUMAN SHOULD LIVE LIKE THAT

Stark Poverty Impresses Sen. Gruening at Bethel

"Such stark poverty. No human should have to live like that."

This was the comment of Senator Ernest Gruening after visiting in some of the homes in Lower Yukon-Kuskokwim hub community of Bethel on May 16.

Gruening, in company with 28 persons representing state and federal agencies, went to Bethel to review the conditions there with a view toward arriving at how best the people can be assisted.

Art Nicholson, the mayor of the town, in a general meeting at the Armory outlined the problems and poverty of the town and stressed the need for economic development, housing and school facilities.

Help to implement the anti-poverty program was especially sought at the meeting attended by about 500 persons including 20 chiefs of surrounding villages.

A 62-page socio-economic survey of the city compiled by the Bethel Community Action committee with assistance from Dr. Lado Kozely, former professor of economic research at the University of Alaska's Institute of Business, Economic and

Government was presented.

The report documents that which has long been known that Bethel is probably the most economically deprived community in the nation as well as Alaska.

It contained page after page of moving description and shocking statistics. Among other things, it showed:

The infant mortality rate among Bethel natives is 144.7, as compared with 24.6 for the nation as a whole.

The tuberculosis rate is 1,423.6 per 100,000 as compared with 440.8 for all Indians in the U.S. and 39.4 for all races in the U.S.

More than 36 per cent of the population of Bethel is under 10 years of age. More than 57 per cent are under 20.

It excerpts a report made to Mayor Nicholson by Professor Kozely:

"During the recent census I had the opportunity to visit several of the houses of the Native residents. The misery and inadequacy of the housing there is appalling, reminding me of the poorest places I have

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Bethel Poverty Impresses Gruening . . .

seen in the world.

The community action group identified the two basic problems as community planning and housing with these related problems: lack of incentive for home study, lack of child care facilities, lack of facilities for persons awaiting hospital admission, living conditions for the elderly and lack of supervised youth activities.

Bethel has already made application under the Economic Opportunity Act for a number of programs.

They have applied for an administration grant for building a community center. A wing on the center would provide space for expectant mothers who come to Bethel about two weeks before hospital admission. Usually without funds they now have to wander from home to home in search of food and shelter.

A temporary home for foster children and a day care center is also sought.

The community has applied for 14 VISTA volunteers to aid them in the community center in the fields of health, welfare and community planning.

An adult education program is sought for the center.

The community has applied for a Neighborhood Youth Corps of 35. The youth would be employed in constructing a dike for protection against erosion which threatens the town.

The community has also applied for a Project Headstart program for 60 pre-school children.

Miller, who has been a Peace Corps worker in South America, says the people of Bethel are ready for the antipoverty program and should show much progress in a short time.