



Question If New Bill Fits Alaska Natives

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Alaskan natives are being asked in the next two weeks to take a careful look at the Indian Omnibus bill.

The bill was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives last month by Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall, who considers it the most important piece of Indian legislation in 30 years.

Udall has instructed Bureau of Indian Affairs officials to

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Indian Omnibus . . .

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solicit citizens opinions on the bill. Regional B.I.A. superintendents met in Anchorage last week to study its contents. This week they were to generate discussions by visiting villages, broadcasting on the radio and reaching concerned persons by other means at their disposal.

The bill's main feature is a government backing of loans by private banks to persons of one-quarter or more native blood. It is an attempt to bring natives into the mainstream of American commercial life by making it possible for them to borrow with limited collateral.

"As far as I can gather, the bill doesn't really help us," State Rep. William Hensley said at Kotzebue. "It's the same old thing all over again. The bill was designed by Congress to take care of reservation Indians. They're trying to make it sound like it's going to help Alaska. But Alaskan natives aren't on reservations. They don't fit into the mold. Our U.S. senators and representative will have to get on it if changes are to be made."

Hensley snorted at the idea that the Bureau of Indian Affairs officials were going out to the villages to discuss the bill. "The B.I.A. is going to ask villagers for suggestions? That bill is so complicated, no one can understand it without a lawyer."

"The B.I.A. is going through these motions so they can go to Congress and say, 'We asked the villages for their opinions and here's what they think.'"

But two Fairbanks bankers and an attorney indicated this week that some sections of the bill may need revision before they can help Alaskans.

"It doesn't help that Alaskan natives don't have clear rights to their land," attorney Thomas Fenton, told the TUNDRA TIMES. "The bill provides for using reservation land as collateral. In Alaska, so much of the land

is worthless and no one has yet determined if it is the native's land to pledge in the first place."

Fenton feels the bill is designed more for lower 48 Indians who have holdings and land they can pledge. "Here the bill would be limited because of the limited collateral natives can put up for loans."

A trust officer at Alaska National Bank of Fairbanks said he now would be more likely to consider loans to remote villages with the government insurance and guarantee.

However Colonel Kenneth C. Haycraft said that he would still be reluctant to loan money to persons without steady work records or some material property to indicate that they would be good credit risks.

"You lose money, on a bad loan even with a government guarantee," he said. "You have to spend a year trying to collect before you can go to the government. The time and effort costs money."

Colonel Haycraft said the bill would not help everyone, but it could "be a good tool in the hands of good, young intelligent aggressive natives. Someone like John Sackett."

Judge Vernon D. Forbes, president of Mount McKinley Mutual Savings Bank agreed that he would consider loans to villagers more favorably with the government guarantee. But he would still want to have a qualified first hand appraisal of any property involved and of local conditions before he would grant the money. "The government probably would have to put an appraiser in the field for outlying villages," he said. It would be too costly and time consuming for bankers to visit villages themselves.

Judge Forbes also indicated that he might consider opening a branch bank to handle increased business at a place like Barrow, if the bill passed.