

Alaskans on the Potomac Opens Wash. Office

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WASHINGTON, D. C.—Staging what they termed an “electromosynary” reception last week, the Alaskans on the Potomac inaugurated their office at 1508 19th Street NW.

The young group, founded in December to provide supportive services to Alaskans and Alaskan Natives visiting Washington, held the reception to raise funds for meeting office expenses.

The program began with a slide presentation by Raymond Paddock, Jr., and concluded with a discussion on rural Alaska housing with Alaska Senator Ted Stevens.

Paddock, a Tlingit Indian originally from Juneau and the organization's vice-president, talked about economic and housing patterns among Alaska Natives.

Senator Stevens received questions and revealed his thoughts on the recently announced federal housing program for rural Alaska villages.

The most crucial aspect of the program, said Senator Stevens, is to make full use of all 1200 units allocated for Alaska during the coming fiscal year.

“If only 600 houses are built prior to July of 1972, we will only be able to get 600 houses next year,” Senator Stevens stated.

“I believe this is a problem of delivery,” he continued.

Greater assurance that all of

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the units can be built would result if, for example, 120 houses each were constructed in ten locations rather than building 12 houses in 100 locations, he said.

One of his biggest fears, noted the Senator, is that the Alaska Federation of Natives may decide to begin the program by building units in so many villages that delivery problems could prevent construction of all available housing during the coming fiscal year.

The AFN has received the contract as primary consultant for the federal housing program in Alaska and has the responsibility of deciding where the 1200 units will be placed.

"If we can prove that we can deliver these homes this year, we can move into smaller villages in future years," he said.

Senator Stevens indicated that he favored adoption of the modular concept of construction for the rural Alaska program.

The greatest success in public housing programs of this type have come about through the use of the modular concept. The comparative ease of delivery of materials, rapid and quality construction, and the freedom for homeowners to select from variations of one basic design are positive favors of the modular concept, he said.

One recent survey shows that eight thousand new homes are needed now in Alaska villages, Senator Stevens added.

It must be remembered that the purpose of the program is to meet this necessity. However well intentioned, any attempt to make this a hiring project for small villages must not jeopardize the emphasis on housing, Senator Stevens stated.

Another important consideration, he added, is the cost of the homes. The cost to the consumer is important. It should be kept as low as possible because Congress may expect recipients to pay a greater share after the Native land claims are settled, he concluded.

Attending the function were representatives of the American Indian Press Association, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, lobbyists working on behalf of the AFN, and members of Alaskans on the Potomac originating from many places in Alaska.

The group feels its efforts are significant because there are so few non-commercial concerns offering support to Alaska Natives while they are in Washington.

Alaskans on the Potomac began seeking contributions for its operation during June. The funds they receive are their only

source of income, since no payment is requested of Native representatives who make use of their facilities.

Most of the furnishings for the Alaska group's new office are on loan from the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Mrs. Anna McAlear, one of the founders of Alaskans on the Potomac, remarked, "We would like to thank the BIA for recognizing the value of what we are trying to do and for helping us with the furniture."

Mrs. McAlear and her husband, James, with Mr. and Mrs. Adam John and Mr. and Mrs. Mike Rowan, founded Alaskans on the Potomac last December. It has grown to include about 25 Alaskans, primarily natives, who live in the Washington area.

"Alaska Natives have so little input into the decisions which affect their lives and which are being made every day in this town. What Alaskans on the Potomac are trying to do can really work if people would just give a darn," Mrs. McAlear explained. "Heck, we can have our own little Alaska Native embassy going here in Washington, D.C."

Included in the project are members of the Alaska Congressional delegation, congressional staff workers, educators, government administrators, political and Indian consultants, doctors, lawyers, as well as military personnel.

President is Thomas Richards, Jr., of Fairbanks and Kotzebue. Paddock is vice-president and Adeline Katongan of Unalakleet is secretary-treasurer.

AOP is a non-profit corporation which hopes to use resources of its members and any professional staff it can afford to hire to evaluate proposed legislation and public or private programs that may affect Alaskan Natives.

It is compiling a library of information on Alaska Natives and also working on a program to make travel arrangements easier for Alaskans visiting the nation's capital.

Progress towards financing the venture was begun with the reception. It made some money, but it is a small beginning.

"Funding could be a problem," Mrs. McAlear said, "but we are persistent people. If it can be done at all, I think we can do it. We are working darned hard."

The determination shown by Alaskans on the Potomac seems to nearly equal that shown by Alaska Natives recently in their land claims battle. With that kind of attitude, they may well succeed.