

Deplorable Native Housing Pointed Out at Conference

(Editor's Note: The following address was delivered by Wendell P. Kay on the first day of the Alaska Native Housing Authority Conference held in Anchorage recently.)

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A little less than two decades ago, when I came to Alaska as the Executive Director of the Alaska Housing Authority, there were only 63 Federal Housing Authority insured mortgages in the entire Territory of Alaska.

A tent with a wooden floor was renting for \$90.00 per month. Shacks were the rule, and not the exception, and housing was the number one problem of all the people.

Of course, today this has been changed. Not entirely changed but enough to put a silver lining on the horizon of the future for most of the people.

But not all. We have no need to discuss Appalachia. Many of you know — better than I do indeed — that here in Alaska we have some 30 or 40 thousand people who would regard Appalachia with envy.

After what you have heard here this morning, or will hear, and after what many of you have seen, it might not be necessary for me to belabor the situation. But I think it bears reiteration. The conditions which exist within many villages of Alaska, especially in the matter of housing, challenge belief. More than 200 of our villages have housing that verily defies description.

"Indoor plumbing" is a honey bucket that can be dumped in the river, together with the pail for melting ice and snow for water. Truly this situation is unique in the United States. These good Alaskans are people who have been taken out of their own civilization and are struggling to enter another. In this transition stage many are furnished only substandard educations, almost all have substandard housing, and a very substantial number must subsist on substandard food. Only their inherent intelligence, good nature and basic abilities offer assurance for the future.

Unfortunately, however, these substandard educations, dilapidated housing and insufficient food are only symptoms — the surface appearance of a hidden condition.

Recently, I listened in amazement to the pronouncement made by a long time Alaskan that "thank heaven, here in Alaska we had little or none of the prejudice and discrimination which marks certain areas of the nation." Truthfully, I cannot con-

ceive of the basis for such complacency or such solemn acceptance of the conditions now surrounding our native population.

I tell you that you would have to search long and hard to find people so greatly discriminated against as the Indians and Eskimos of Alaska. True, they suffer no forthright prejudice, but I sometimes think they would be better off for honest antagonism instead of paternalistic tolerance.

We have not done enough — in fact, we have hardly made a start — to bring the native peoples regular employment, real education and vocational training, and a fair chance at genuine economic opportunity. It is not enough to pull a whole race of people out of the past and then hand them a welfare check.

I want to suggest that it is high time for us to stop doing an ostrich act — get our heads out of the sands of paternalistic tolerance, and start now to restore these people to their rightful place in our society as equal consumers and equal citizens. They have a valuable contribution to make and they ask only to be permitted to move ahead.

Believe me, this housing program initiated by Senator Bartlett is indeed a tremendous step in the right direction.