

DON WRIGHT MEETS PRESIDENT

Nixon Sends Land Bill Proposal to Congress

WASHINGTON, D.C., April 6—Alaska Federation of Natives President Don Wright met today with President Richard M. Nixon for a 15 minute discussion of the Alaska Natives land claims bill.

"He left me with the impression he was very sincerely interested in doing justice and in satisfying the needs of the Alaskan native people," Wright said later about his meeting with the president.

"The President regarded the Alaskan Native Land Claims administration proposal as an implementation of the administration's new Indian policy," Wright said.

He said that the President

seemed very open minded and had a feeling for our position.

The administration today sent its bill to Congress with a special accompanying message from the President.

Also present at Wright's meeting with the President was Senator **Ted** Stevens (R-Alaska) and Frank Bracken of the Interior Department.

According to Wright, the President said he regarded the administration land claims proposal as a floor or foundation for a just settlement.

With the entry of the administration land claims bill, Congress is moving quickly towards the resolution of Alaska's Native Land Claims.

Within the past week, both the House and Senate Interior and Insular Affairs Committees have announced dates for hopefully final hearings on the land claims bills.

Senator Henry M. Jackson (D-Washington), chairman of the Senate committee has scheduled a hearing on the land claims bill

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for April 17.

House Interior Committee hearings were scheduled last week for May 3, to be followed by a full week to be devoted to

"marking up" the final land claims bill to be submitted to the full Congress.

Despite fears that land claims would be held up in Congress by a lengthy SST debate, this did

not occur. As the Congressional session opened, Senator Jackson's main concern was passage of the SST appropriation, a vitally important measure to his aircraft industry dominated and unemployment plagued home state.

By last week, the SST question had been settled for this year, by a Congressional vote to withhold further funds for the project. Despite his lack of success in the debate, its resolution freed Senator Jackson to concentrate on other important matters in his committee - and native land claims heads the list.

Another feared roadblock - an anti-land group of conservative Congressmen to be centered around Secretary of the Interior Rogers C.B. Morton, did not materialize.

Mr. Morton's recent pronouncements have shown major changes from those he made during his first weeks in office and the administration bill is a highly favorable one to Alaskan Natives.

The White House proposal, will give Alaskan Natives fee title to 40 million acres. In special instances, such as federal reserves, Natives may select land there but would not receive mineral rights.

In place of the mine rights on this particular selection, Natives would be allowed to select mineral rights to other lands provided the lands were within a specified distance of the village involved.

Under the bill's provisions, the Native village would become the dominant selection unit.

Terms of the bill provide four townships for each village, plus additional land the village needs within a range of 25 townships. Each village will own the lands and in most cases the sub-surface rights.

After the villages have selected their lands, the Natives will be able to select other lands up to the total of 40 million acres. The plan expects that the Native people would select approximately 20 million acres around the villages and then an additional 20 million acres.

However, the bill will not allow Natives to select land already selected by the state but only tentatively approved for patent.

The administration bill abolishes the five year land freeze in the previous Senate bill. Natives will select their land first, followed by selections by Federal programs and then the State of Alaska.

The land claims bill contains a federal appropriation of \$500 million. This provision is similar to that included in the Senate bill sponsored by Sen. Henry M. Jackson.

Although the revenue sharing provision has reportedly been approved by the Bureau of the Budget, the bureau reportedly has not yet approved a \$500 million federal grant.

Selections, according to the bill, would only be suspended for litigation if the litigation originates with the state.

Essentially, according to most sources, the administration bill is very similar to the legislation passed by last year's Senate as S 1830, except for the increase in the land grant.

Last Wednesday (March 31), Representative Lloyd Meeds of Washington introduced the AFN land claims bill—calling for 60 million acres, \$500 million and a 2 per cent overriding mineral royalty—into the House of Representatives.

Meeds introduced the bill along with 25 cosponsors—the maximum number allowed on a House bill. By this week, Wright hopes to be ready with another version of the same bill—to accommodate additional cosponsors.

The AFN bill now in the House parallels a similar AFN bill introduced in the Senate several weeks ago which has attracted many cosponsors.