

# The Superlative Effort

The native leadership effort trying for equitable resolution of the Alaska native land claims in recent weeks has been nothing short of remarkable. And the response from the White House on these efforts has also been awe-inspiring and almost unbelievable in scope as well as the extent of understanding the complex problem.

The White House has shown to date the closest and equitable approach to the claims issue as presented by the native leadership. President Richard Nixon and his Vice President Spiro Agnew have lent sympathetic ears. As a result, they have buoyed up tremendous hopes for equitable resolution to the claims issue never before realized in the long struggle for solution.

The National Council on Indian Opportunity, in our opinion, played a vital role in involving the White House on the issue. The NCIO, an organization to better Indian situations, has the membership of the cabinet members, Indian leaders, and is chaired by Vice President Agnew. That organization, the Alaska native leadership with the backing of Indian leaders throughout the nation, and the President's insistence that the Indians pursue self-determination in meeting their needs, no doubt determined the formulation of the White House native land claims bill that was made public last week. The bill is asking for 40 million acres of land, \$500 million from the U.S. Treasury, and another \$500 million from revenue sharing. The White House bill is superseded only by the Alaska Federation of natives backed bill introduced by Senator Fred Harris of Oklahoma. That bill is asking 60 million acres, \$500 million along with 2 per cent overriding royalty in perpetuity.

Mrs. Laura Bergt, a lady of Eskimo extraction from Kotzebue, now of Fairbanks, was instrumental in the arrangement of the White House meeting of the AFN members, including Donald Wright, AFN president, Laura herself, Secretary of the Interior Rogers C.B. Morton, President Nixon's special assistants and which was chaired by Vice President Agnew. Laura had requested Agnew at the Indian leaders conference at Kansas City that the administration members meet with the Alaska Federation of Natives representatives on the matter of the land claims issue.

The White House meeting was held on March 12, chaired by Agnew at the outset. During the two-hour meeting, Agnew turned the chair over to AFN President Don Wright who then presented a dramatic appeal to the administration on the question of the native land claims. It is being deemed now that Wright's eloquent presentation might have influenced policy changes by the administration toward the claims issue, and that these changes have been reflected in the White House bill.

The White House meeting, a major event in itself, had a unique and amusing beginning. It all started with the rubbing of noses--(an old Eskimo custom which we understand was done mostly by Eskimo grandmothers to their grandchildren to lessen the chance of giving the baby some sickness)--between the experienced Laura Bergt and neophyte Spiro Agnew.

The unique protocol might have helped to break the ice leading to Laura's request of Agnew that a White House meeting be held.

After that historic get-together, Tundra Times contacted President John Borbridge of the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indians of Alaska at his Juneau office. When asked what he thought of the White House meeting, Borbridge was quick to reply:

"We are thinking around here that that bit of Eskimo osculation between Laura and Agnew might have been worth about two million acres."

Who knows, it could be worth more than that. At any rate, we will be part of the huge audience watching the congressional legislation in the near future to resolve the century old Alaska native land claims issue.