

Gravel's TT Report

By Mike Gravel
U.S. Senator, Alaska

We've all waited a long time, but it's finally happened: The first checks from the Alaska Native Fund have been sent out. I share your joy over the settlement of the long-standing claims of Alaska's Natives.

I also want to make sure everyone is aware of the kind of hustler that may prey on Natives and their corporations.

SUSPECTED HUSTLERS REACH DOYON

We've received our first reports — from the Doyon Native Regional Corporation — of what may become a scheme to take advantage of unsuspecting families receiving Native Fund checks.

UNIDENTIFIED "CANVASSERS"

According to families within the Doyon region, unfamiliar "canvassers" have visited a few homes there, seeking permission to place Native families on a special "list." Supposedly, the list is being compiled by an "educational firm," for use Outside.

No one has been able to verify the existence of the mysterious "educational firm" or of any legitimate group which is sending out door-to-door canvassers. Why would a company want the names of Natives getting Settlement Act funds?

NATIVE MAILING LISTS?

One possibility is that these so-called canvassers really wanted to get the individuals' names, along with others in Doyon, in order to put together a list of Native Corporation members. Such a list could prove quite valuable to an enterprising hustler. He could sell the master list to companies, magazines, and other firms; these names could then be used by those companies as a mailing list, or even for sending salesmen into the area.

INVESTMENT SCHEMES?

Another, far more sinister plan, could involve bilking innocent victims through fake investment or "quick money" schemes.

A company with a fake

"front" and false address could send its representatives into the Native villages and regions, assuring recipients that, if they will just invest their Native Fund checks with them, the "company" will reinvest the money and guarantee a rapid increase in money, in a very short time.

Naturally, the victims would never hear from the money-grubbers again — until they received their next Native Fund check.

ONE PREVENTIVE MOVE: DEMAND I.D.

One means of combatting these schemes is simply to demand proper identification of any canvasser. Genuine canvassers will present a card from the firm they represent, or a similar official document, which should include at least the canvasser's name, the title of his company, and his company's exact address.

DEPARTMENT OF LAW FUNDS

The director of the Alaska Criminal Justice Planning Agency has told me that a means of publicizing and combatting the schemers has been devised.

Using \$2,485 from a U.S. Department of Justice Law Enforcement Assistance Administration block grant, plus a lesser amount from the Department of Law in Alaska, seminars will be held in three main areas: Anchorage-Kodiak; Fairbanks-Bethel-Kotzebue; and Juneau-Sitka-Petersburg - Wrangell - Ketchikan. With the help of the Alaska Consumer Protection Office, part of the money will be used to produce a newsletter and 20 radio programs, all designed to expose such rip-off activities.

DO YOUR PART

Ultimately, though, it's up to each person to avoid becoming victimized by the hustlers and to expose any such schemes. There's nearly a billion dollars involved in the Land Claims Settlement Act — a most tempting source for a fast buck by the unscrupulous.

The time to put a stop to such activities is now.