

Editorial—

Native People Could Be Caught Napping

Land legislation in Congress may not go well for the native people of Alaska. There is real reason to be concerned because the native land bill that was drawn up in Anchorage at the first meeting of the then Alaska Federation of Native Associations is now buried in the Judiciary Committee in Congress. When land hearings are held in Alaska, possibly later in the year and possibly under the chairmanship of Senator Henry Jackson of the Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, testimony on S-2020, the native land bill, may not be heard but instead the S-1964, a bill drawn up by the Interior Department, may take the sole attention of the hearings. The latter bill has met with rampant disfavor by our people and their leaders. It is a short-sighted bill that recommends the villages would be given an area of land that measures less than nine miles square. That bill also recommends that compensation for lands lost would be based on the price level at the time Alaska was sold to the United States by Russia back in 1867, or at two cents an acre.

Two weeks ago, Hugh Nicholls, first vice president of the Arctic Slope Native Association with headquarters at Barrow, wrote to Senator Ernest Gruening who had introduced S-2020, the native bill, to Congress. What Nicholls had to say about the bill is worth close scrutiny, and study, to try to see what had happened that caused the bill to be buried in the Judiciary Committee. What was the reason? Who was responsible?

"What I wished to discuss," Hugh Nicholls wrote, "was that the Native bill introduced in the Senate

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"I may not agree with a word you say but I will defend your right to say it." Voltaire

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(S-2020) is now buried in the Judiciary Committee. This must come out of Judiciary and go to Insular and Interior Affairs Committee so that hearings, when held by Senator Jackson in Alaska, may include testimony on both S-1964 and S-2020. I am not so naive as to believe that the full committee will come again to Alaska to hear testimony on two separate occasions, so it is imperative that both bills be heard at the one time. Also bills have a peculiar habit of dying in committees when not particularly favored, and no hearings have been set by the Judiciary Committee on the bill S-2020. That both bills are heard by Senator Jackson's committee at the same time is only logical and practical and the Native people of Alaska desire that you exert the utmost effort in effecting the change of committees on S-2020 so that the above may take place."

What Nicholls had to say about the native bill is worth a great deal of thought. His demand should be echoed by every prominent native leader in Alaska. If S-2020 remains buried in the Judiciary Committee, our people can be sure that they will not be treated equitably in the area of our greatest concern—lands with which we desire to insure ourselves against inequality of treatment now and in the future of our people.

It is time for us to sharpen our senses. Processes of cheating us of things we hold dear seem to be becoming evident and we must not be caught napping. We know what our lands mean to us. We live intimately with our surroundings and having done this always, we can speak best for ourselves. We also know that there are efforts afoot to turn public opinion against us—to discredit the native stand on land issues. This has been methodically dispensed by the present State Attorney General who speaks out against the native stand on occasions and at gatherings where he thought he would be most effective. Let us not sell him short. He has hurt us.

Things are beginning to go wrong—let us remember this. Perhaps we can do something about this situation. As we have pointed out numerous times in the past, the native people have at their disposal a political potential that would not only benefit them immensely, but which would also help them install public servants who would best represent them. It is a potent force that should not be denied. If it was organized properly, it can move mountains, so to speak. Its development should be foremost in the minds of our leaders. It is one force that could attain for us benefits and respect of our fellow citizens in our state. Let us give it every chance to work for us. Employing this force properly could prove invaluable in areas of our great needs. It can be an important force that could help attain for us fair and just solutions to our land problems.