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Nixon Could Veto Land Claims Bill If Not Satisfactory

FAIRBANKS—The President of the United States could well be expected to block a land claims bill that was unfair to Alaskan Natives, Don Wright, president of the Alaska Feder-

ation of Natives, told the Tanana Chiefs here Sunday.

"He's given us reasonable assurance unless a bill passes that the Native people can live with, he'll veto it and try again

next year," Wright said. "It looks like about September we should know."

The predicted power struggle between Minto delegates and Al Ketzler, head of the Tanana

Chiefs, fizzled early in the conference and land became the major topic of discussion.

It began with a talk on land allotments by John Shively, director of the Rural Alaska

Community Action Program. He told the Chiefs his agency got involved because it thought the state was not telling Natives enough about acquiring property

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they're entitled to.

"The whole Tanana Valley is under state TA (tentative approval for acquisition from the federal government). Do you think they're doing something underhanded?" asked Carl Charles of Dot Lake.

"That's exactly what they're doing," Shively answered. "If you can prove title to state TAed land, then you should file an allotment on it and if they protest it you should take it to court. As much land as we can get in Native hands, the better we're going to be."

It was noted that the final version of the Native land claims bill before Congress will probably repeal the Native Allotment Act and qualified natives are urged to file as soon as possible. Shively detailed filing requirements and distributed a handbook on allotments prepared by Alaska Legal Services.

Discussion turned to gaining clear title and acquiring mineral rights. Several Natives reported receiving letters from the state asking if they had minerals under their allotments. They were advised not to answer because once minerals are declared Natives cannot gain mineral rights.

Ketzler reported he had been able to gain quick patent to his allotment "but I think they put it through so I wouldn't know how much trouble everybody else had," he added.

Ruby Tansy John said she had filed on less than her allowed 160 acres and received a quick offer of patent "if that is all the land you want." She wrote

the government she certainly did intend to file on more land and has yet to receive patent.

Guest speaker Wright predicted the land freeze currently imposed on the state by the Secretary of Interior, will remain in effect until Native land claims are settled by Congress. If, however, the freeze is lifted he said AFN has prepared a series of law suits that will serve as a freeze.

He said he, personally, had more to do with the Arctic Slope Native Association's not filing suit than most people thought.

"It would cause more harm than good if not properly filed," he said. "The Stevens Village suit is a good and recognized suit and if they should lift the freeze we would have to do the same thing over the whole state."

Edwin Simon of Huslia wondered if Charlie Edwardson and Joe Upicksoun of Arctic Slope were just out for publicity.

"Some things they did have caused problems but their basic intent is not bad, it's good," Wright answered. "Their personal allegations hurt us all but, really, they do have a valid good law suit potential."

Other delegates worried that lawyers fees would take the bulk of land claims settlement.

"There's no way that can happen. I can't see even one per cent getting to the attorneys," the AFN leader assured them. It cost almost \$1 million in legal fees to settle the Tlingit-Haida suit which is small in compari-

son to the AFN suit, he noted. To date the AFN bill is not much over \$400,000.

"Congress has expressed the same fear as you have and they're writing in some safeguards," Al Ketzler added.

Delegates also questioned Wright on state attempts to classify land. It was reported that Robert Krumm of the area Bureau of Land Management office had appeared in Eagle "with a fancy little map that set aside only a five mile area for native land allotments."

"Your job is to tell your people they don't necessarily have to believe those bureaucrats," Wright said. "It's good they're letting us know how they're thinking so we can change that. It's not going to do us any harm providing it doesn't pass."