

ASNA's Joe Upicksoun Vows to Block Pipeline Until Bill Passes

"We will stop that pipeline till the land claims bill is settled," insists Arctic Slope Native Association president Joe Upicksoun. "If AFN can't do it, ASNA will."

The ASNA has already prepared a suit to stop any "trespassing" to build a pipeline until Congress acts on the land claims issue, revealed the head of that militant organization of Arctic Slope Eskimos.

"Congress has not extinguished our (the Indian) title yet," said the ASNA President. "There have been cases in the Supreme Court deciding Indian title is

property. ~~Since~~ Congress has not extinguished Indian title north of the Brooks Range, there are no public lands there. The Arctic Slope region is the only area where there are no patented lands."

"There is going to be a bill. We know that. How soon, we don't know."

Upicksoun knows the pipeline will be built. Whether it goes south through Alaska or east through Canada, it must pass across the land of his people—the Arctic Slope.

He believes the technical problems in building a pipeline

can be solved, but some degree of pollution and possible oil spillage is inevitable.

"Compensation is a big question," he said. "The Federal government is bonded for oil spillage. No provision has been made, however, for Natives, in the event of oil spill, to be compensated."

In a land where "90 per cent of his people still live off the land directly or indirectly," Upicksoun and the ASNA would like provisions made for compensation in cases of oil spillage. This money would go to the

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people whose land and subsistence was being damaged.

The ASNA will suggest to the Interior Department at its hearings on environmental influences that the oil companies be required, in cases of oil spills, to pay an indemnity of \$15 per gallon to the Native people.

Land is, of course, the crux of the issue. Upicksoun has harsh words for AFN leaders who could only obtain surface rights to 500,000 acres of land in a Senate bill last year.

"Getting us that land in that form was a fraud," he explained. "The AFN didn't get us ownership."

Ramsey Clark, he thought, was too busy as a lawyer to have much time to work for the AFN.

"He has other commitments," Upicksoun said. He himself went to Washington last spring to press for a land claims settlement which would preserve their land for his people.

"I was one angry Eskimo," he described himself cornering Senators and Representatives in all places looking for support on the land claims issue.

One proposal which will give the Arctic Slope greater power over its own affairs is their petition to form a First Class Borough—a plan which could become a reality within six months.

"The petition should be complete," Upicksoun told the Tundra Times when he stopped in Fairbanks. Twenty-five per cent of the voters in the area, which covers the entire North Slope, must sign a petition for a first class borough.

It now goes to the Local Affairs Agency which must start the process of hearings, investigations and report to the Local Boundary Commission. If all goes on schedule, the North Slope Borough could be a reality by summer.

Robert Dupere and Associates, the government consulting firm ASNA employed to prepare the incorporation proposal, is now working on a charter for the new borough.

Upicksoun expects his main opposition to a North Slope Borough to come from the city of Fairbanks. Legislative action could ease the way for the new Borough, or could block it.

"I'm prepared to buck them hard," Upicksoun said forcefully. "We'll use their own laws. Fairbanks has their eyes on the North Slope area too."

He expects to give strong testimony at any legislative or state hearings.

In past months, Upicksoun has made innumerable trips away from Barrow—to Fairbanks, Anchorage, Juneau, Seattle and Washington D.C.

"I'm getting homesick," he said as he stopped in Fairbanks for a day on his way to Barrow after two weeks in Washington D.C. and Seattle. He postponed his return home to obtain a copy of the land claims bill

Congressman Wayne Aspinall introduced in the House last week.

"They're still stuck on that 160 acres," he complained after reading the bill. Upicksoun believes surface or subsistence rights to land are actually, if not totally, worthless.

He left further comment till after he had studied the bill more closely. In a few days, he must leave Barrow again for Fairbanks, the jet age schedule belying comments made by drafters of the Senate bill about "unsophisticated people."

In Washington, meetings of agency and Alaska representatives last week began to pave the way for Federal funding for the planned Barrow Air Terminal.

Joe Upicksoun represented Barrow at these meetings, discussing proposals with Alaskan Senators Stevens and Gravel, Congressman Begich, BIA officials of the Economic Development Administration and Small Business Administration.

Barrow seeks a grant for the air terminal from the EDA Indian Desk. To obtain one, it must first be classified as an "Indian reservation" for grant purposes.

There are only seven recognized reservations in Alaska, but many officials propose designating all of rural Alaska as a reservation for eligibility purposes.

A series of planning and pre-proposal meetings must precede any decision on the possible \$2½ million Barrow could get in grant and loan monies.

Upicksoun also commented on prospective staff changes in the Bureau of Indian Affairs, changes which will greatly affect the development of his area.

"ASNA believes the Alaska Area Director should have had at least two years experience in the Arctic Slope region. That's where the activities are going to be and it's hard to communicate with someone without that experience."

"We feel any problems that come up south of the Arctic Slope region are common, routine."

Barrow, he believes, is now large enough to have its own BIA subagency. In the meantime, present Fairbanks Field Administrator Wallace Craig expects an imminent transfer, leaving the Fairbanks agency job open.

"Wally Craig as Field Administrator has rare qualifications," Upicksoun commented on Craig's close knowledge of the doings in the Northern part of his huge territory.

The Fairbanks Agency Native Board will make recommendations on any replacement, to be endorsed by the ASNA and Tanana Chiefs.

A few tentative suggestions have been heard, Upicksoun said, that the local Native groups might seek to contract the Fairbanks agency job. If any decision is to be made, it must be made soon.