

Joe Josephson Pens Column--

Answers Questions on Land Use Planning Commission

By JOE JOSEPHSON

I am pleased to answer in the TUNDRA TIMES some of the questions asked most often about the Joint Federal-State Land Use Planning Commission. Less than eight months ago, I assumed office as Governor Egan's State Co-Chairman Designee.

Certainly great progress has been made. Certainly much remains to be done. Public understanding and awareness of the Commission are essential to its success. In this column,

and future ones, I hope to help keep TUNDRA TIMES readers informed about the ongoing role of the Commission.

Question 1. How much influence can the Commission expect to have, since it is an advisory body?

Answer: The Commission is essentially an advisory agency. But in a free system of government, where power is diffused among several branches of government, divided at Federal, State and local levels, and has many centers, the distinction between administrative or regulatory

agencies, on the one hand, and advisory agencies on the others is a small one.

For example, by December 18, 1973, the Secretary of the Interior will submit recommendations for legislation by Congress which might affect up to approximately 80 million acres of Alaska land now under study as so-called "(d) (2)" lands.

The Secretary's report will advise the Congress. It will go to a committee in the U.S. House of Representatives, which in turn will advise the full House

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and parallel steps will occur in the Senate. The Commission, by August, will have advised the Secretary, and may also seek to influence the Congress by written reports and oral testimony.

But clearly, the Secretary's role here, as well as the Commission's will be "advisory", and whatever legislation Congress approves will also undergo White House review, approval or veto. I therefore hope Alaskans will not be deterred in using the Commission as a new tool which may influence the Federal decision-making process.

Question 2. Why do you think the Commission will have a real influence on Federal decisions?

Answer: I think the record to date suggests strong respect in Washington for recommendations by the Commission. Among numerous examples I might cite are the selection of Federal Co-Chairman Horton as Assistant Secretary of the Interior; Federal support for Commission budget requests; approval by the Department of the Interior of most recommendations by the Commission to which the Department has responded substantively; the decision by the Secretary of the Interior to request the Commission to conduct all public hearings on the future of "(d) (2)" land withdrawals and to receive the Commission's recommendations before preparing his report to the Congress. The Commission, I might add, has enjoyed strong support from Governor William A. Egan and his administration.

Of course, full acceptance in Washington of our recommendations is not to be expected. Of course, we Alaskans must use all of our traditional tools for affecting Federal decisions, such as the important process of direct State-Federal contacts on a government-to-government basis, the role of our delegation in Congress, and letters to members of Congress in general. But the Commission is certainly an additional avenue which must not go unutilized.

In the final analysis, only history will record properly the degree of the Commission's importance in decisions affecting Alaskans. In the meantime, we must all operate on the assumption that the Commission will have an important influence on either the national administration or the Congress, or both, lest we fail to make use of an effective tool for a better Alaska.

Question 3. Is the record of the Commission a "pro-Native" or "anti-Native" record?

Answer: I hope the Commission does not consciously approach problems before it on that basis and that the public will judge the Commission by its actions. Let the Commission be fair and the results will speak for themselves.

But let's look at the record. The Commission has submitted comments on proposed rules implementing the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act suggesting about fifty revisions. The Commission has recommended additional withdrawals for several regional corporations, and that Native withdrawals should take precedence over others. The Commission has recommended immediate conveyances to eligible villages of the so-called "core townships" in which these villages are located.

At the same time the Commission has made unprecedented efforts to reach rural Alaska in informal meetings and hearings. These are but a few of the indications which encourage me to think that the results of our work will benefit Alaskans of all races.

Today we have answered a few of the questions which we encounter on meeting with the public. In future columns which will be published from time to time, I would like to deal with the questions submitted by TUNDRA TIMES readers. Questions regarding the role of the Commission can be addressed to me at 733 West Fourth Avenue, Suite 400, Anchorage, Alaska 99501.