

SECRETARY UDALL RETAINS LAND FREEZE

"...The next Secretary will be faced with the very difficult decision as to whether to continue the land freeze," so said the Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall in his prepared speech written for delivery at the Tundra Times Sixth Anni-

versary Banquet at the Switzerland last Saturday night.

Secretary Udall by that statement ended speculations that he would announce the lifting of the freeze during his keynote speech at the banquet.

Although following the main

body of his prepared address, Udall for the most part spoke extemporaneously and as a result, some people almost missed his announcement that he would retain the land freeze.

Some said that he "padded" the announcement as he made it

extemporaneously.

Emil Notti, president of the Alaska Federation of Natives, thought Secretary Udall made his announcement softly and subtly.

Under the terms of the State native land claims legislation,

Udall was directed to lift the land freeze by October 10 (yesterday).

"I am well aware that under the terms of the State's Native claims legislation I must lift the freeze by next week if the Nat-

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ives are to receive any benefits," Udall pointed out.

"My views on the land freeze are well known. Frankly, I do not believe we would have made any significant progress on the Native claims issue if we had not held everybody's feet to the fire, or perhaps I should say to the ice, with the freeze.

"As I have said many times before, I do not intend to lift it. While I believe that one objective of the State legislature was to obtain Native support for the lifting of the freeze, I believe that it should also be construed as a good faith offer by the State of assistance to the Native people.

"If that view is correct, I would expect that the offer will be renewed subsequently by the State in a form that will complement the Federal legislation."

At this point, the Interior Secretary mentioned the recent ruling of Judge James A. Von Der Heydt of the U.S. District Court in Anchorage that the land freeze was illegal.

"As you know," Udall stated "The U.S. District Court recently ruled against us on that part of the freeze involving our refusal to patent State selections. Our lawyers tell me that we have a good case and we intend to appeal.

"I am hopeful, however, that the appeal will become moot through the speedy enactment of claims' legislation.

"There is one facet of the freeze on which I have had very little to say—the purported revenue less to the State of Alaska, because of our failure to issue oil and gas leases.

"It has been argued that the State has been deprived of its 90 percent share of the 50-cent per acre rental that is received under these leases. However, I would like to point out that under the present law virtually all leases on public lands in Alaska, including millions of acres which are believed to have great oil and gas potential, must be issued on a non-competitive basis.

"We are hopeful that Congress will soon see fit to revise this anachronistic law so that the Government can obtain fair market value for its resources. In the meantime, it is just not good management for the Federal Government to lease valuable acreage non-competitively that would doubtless bring bonuses running into hundreds of millions of dollars if it could be leased competitively.

"While the State might obtain several millions of dollars in the short run by our leasing, it would do so at the expense of losing many times that amount in the long run."

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In warning to his announcement to retain the land freeze, Secretary Udall told the banquet audience about his frustrations with the Indian Bureau for nearly eight years.

"It has not always been as vigorous as we might have liked," he said, "But nonetheless, I

bristle when I see sweeping charges that the Bureau is primarily interested in perpetuating its hold on the Indian people."

He said last year the Interior Department considerable time and effort developing legislation that would permit it to turn over to Indian tribes the authority to manage their own lands.

"Much to my surprise and chagrin this move met with widespread opposition among Indian leaders, who would rather have the Bureau to 'lean on' frequently in both senses of the term.

"Fortunately, most of your leaders in Alaska are willing to accept the responsibility of managing your own affairs. As you are growing to assume that role, I ask you to avoid the easy course of blaming BIA for all of the failures along the road.

"When you believe that the Bureau should be taken to task, do so, but try to be both specific and constructive with your criticism."

Udall cited last November when he met with the native leaders on land claims matters in Anchorage. He said that the claims issue then seemed to be in the doldrums.

"Today it is, in my opinion, on the verge of resolution. This is due in large part to the fact that the Native leadership, the congressional delegation and the State have all been pulling in the same direction," Udall pointed out.

He said he hoped that the people were not disheartened by the failure to get a bill enacted this year; that the issues of this magnitude are just too formidable to speed through the legislative process.

He said two decades were required to obtain passage of the Central Arizona Project; that those years were devoted to much hard work on the part of the proponents and the Congress.

"However, hard work alone did not put that project over the top," he said. "Unless the advocates had been willing to compromise by giving up features which, although desirable, were not essential, we would not have legislation today."

"If you are to be successful in this struggle," Udall continued, "your leaders will undoubtedly be called upon to exercise their judgement on short notice without time for consultation at the village level.

"Bear in mind that they are leaders, not messengers. You chose them because you felt that they possessed the qualifications and good judgement to represent you. They may not be able to obtain everything that you and they would like.

"It is far easier to be doctrinaire and intransigent, than it is to make the hard decisions that will bring results."

The Secretary said that when the Interior Department submitted its first land solutions proposal, he was proud to be the first Secretary of the Interior to tackle the longstanding problem.

"In retrospect I see that our proposed solution left much to be desired," he said. "However, I need make no apologies for the principles for a just settlement that were laid down by President Johnson. Under any equitable settlement, the Natives should

receive:

"(1) title to the lands you occupy and need to sustain your villages;

"(2) rights to use additional lands and water to maintain your traditional way of life if you so choose; and

"(3) compensation commensurate with the value of lands taken from you.

"I believe that it is incumbent upon the Native leaders to make a convincing case for translating these principles into concrete terms. Their presentation to the Congress last July contributed appreciably toward that end.

"I hope that the time for results will be at hand in the next session of the Congress.

"But, while there has been widespread agreement on the principles for a just solution, and the Administration and Native leadership are much closer to agreement than we were a year ago, the basic issues of how much land and how much money are far from being resolved."

Other dignitaries besides Secretary Udall who addressed the Tundra Times banquet audience were: Governor of Alaska Walter J. Hickel; Sen. Ernest Gruening; Congressman Howard W. Pollock; and the AFN President Emil Notti introduced Udall to the audience.

All of the speakers paid warm tribute to the work of the Tundra Times. An hour of the banquet program was televised by KFAR-TV and radio simulcasted for the benefit of the rural listeners.

Prof. Jimmie Bedford laid the scene for stock sale at the banquet as well as presneting the meaning of the stockholders Walrus Tooth Club.

The banquet had two masters of ceremonies in the persons of Richard Frank, former chief of Minto, an Athabaskan, and Sylvester Ayek, an Eskimo from King Island. The two men received warm response from the audience for their sense of humor and good performance.

Secretary Udall concluded his address in the following manner:

"In closing, I would like to thank Howard Rock and Emil Notti once again for their kind invitation to be with you at this impressive gathering. I am hopeful that next time we meet it will be to celebrate the enactment of legislation resolving the Native claims issue."