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Over 200 Alaskans Testify at Anchorage Hearing

Over 200 Alaskans from all walks of life, and all points of view, testified on the environmental impact of a trans Alaska pipeline during five days of Interior Department hearings in Anchorage last week.

The U.S. Interior Department Environmental Impact hearings began Wednesday (Feb. 24) at Sydney Lawrence Auditorium in Anchorage with several hours of

testimony from State officials.

Alaskan politicians "measuredly stumped for ecology; then voted unanimously for the pipeline" according to Allan Frank of the Anchorage Daily News.

Governor William A. Egan led off the testimony by yielding the podium to Senator Ted Stevens (R-Alaska) who had to catch a plane for Washington.

The governor led a scheduled

two hour presentation by state officials who stressed Alaska's insular pride and desire to develop as a full-fledged state of the Union.

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Over 200 Testify at Hearing...

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Conservationist testimony began in earnest Wednesday night, led by Miss Celia M. Hunter, Alaskan Conservation Society representative, who proposed studies of alternate means of oil transportation. She also asked for stringent enforcement of environmental stipulations for any pipeline.

Former Alaska Gov. Walter J. Hickel led off the second day of pipeline testimony by announcing his conviction that the pipeline "can be built safely."

"It's up to the government," Hickel said, "to demand that stipulations and regulations be followed so we can have the wise use and conservation of these resources."

In his testimony, Hickel answered Secretary of the Interior Rogers C.B. Morton who said in Washington that Hickel was under pressure to approve a pipeline permit for Alyeska Pipeline Co.

Pressures came from both sides, Hickel said, but "if we work together, we can do it right." Much of Thursday was filled by testimony from Alyeska pipeline officials and consultants (see Page 5).

Among the speakers was Fairbanks Mayor Julian C. Rice, a strong advocate of prompt action on the pipeline who compared conservationist arguments to "fresh moose droppings" he sees on the streets of Fairbanks.

Dr. Edgar Wayburn of San Francisco, vice president of the Sierra Club, testified that despite the apparently reassuring summary of the environmental impact report, damage attendant to pipeline construction and use "would be enormous."

The damage would be so potentially devastating, said Wayburn, that the Dept. of the Interior should not grant a permit for the pipeline to be built across federal lands in Alaska.

Many Alaskan Natives supported the pipeline construction, with various stipulations.

David Wolf, attorney for the Native villages of Stevens Village, Rampart, Minto, Bettles, and Allakaket, asked for compensation for environment damage to be paid to the Natives who live off the land.

Wolf was joined in his claim that the present draft stipulations for the pipeline allow no recourse to liability suits against Alyeska pipeline Co. by Ross

Mullins, spokesman for the Cordova District Fisheries Union.

Mullins promised a court suit to block the pipeline permit if extensive tests of oil spill effects on marine life are not undertaken.

The fishermen of Cordova see the Valdez pipeline as a potential threat by oil spill to their livelihood.

Ken Roennhildt, superintendent for Point Chehalis Packers, also protested probable detrimental effects of the pipeline on the fishing industry in Prince William Sound.

"Cordova stands the chance of becoming a ghost town," said Roennhildt.

"What effects will oil pollution have on the cannery industry? Will we be forced to test every fish to determine that it is safe to can or freeze? Will costs be added to the already high costs of our products because of oil pollution?"

"What recourse would fishermen and processors have against the oil people should a major disaster completely wipe out the Prince William Sound fishery?"

Natives from the five villages Wolf represents, two of whom already have suits pending against a pipeline permit, want the environmental impact draft amended before they allow construction.

The Natives want bonds insuring payments for damages resulting from pipeline construction or accident. Native pipeline inspectors, chosen by Natives, to insure enforcement of the stipulations; briefings for Natives before pipeline decisions are made; Native input into any Native employment training program; cash compensation by ALPS for damage to Native lands due to pipeline construction.

Other Alaskans who testified at the pipeline hearings included: Former Governor Keith A. Miller... "The bulk of the problems are attributable to the oil companies themselves. They felt all they had to do was apply for a permit, get it and begin construction."

Rep. Helen Fisher of Anchorage... "I want to eliminate poverty pollution." She said she is concerned with the total environment and with the species called Homo Sapien.

Commissioner of Highways, Bruce A. Campbell... "Now one must search to find

even a trace of the once-broad scars left by the early stamperers."

Commissioner of Economic Development Irene Ryan... "Outsiders can expound until doomsday their feelings and desire to preserve Alaska for colorful nature books and as a monument to nature. But do they have the right to force that decision upon others to live in degradation and poverty, within scenic beauty but without opportunity for self improvement."

Robert Willard, executive director of the Alaska State Commission for Human Rights... urged strong stipulations to guarantee work for local area residents.

Gov. William A. Egan... Royalties and taxes from the pipeline will enable the state to alleviate poverty, ignorance and disease. Without it, the state faces financial ruin. "Given our economic system, the development of natural resources is the only avenue yet devised for providing the means by which people can better their lives."

Jimmy Huntington of Kusiluk... there should be no consideration of a pipeline project until the native claims issue is settled in Congress. The natives must "stand firm for a just settlement."

Laura Bergt of Fairbanks... "Only after the Alaska Native Land Claims is settled, the construction of the pipeline would offer an opportunity to alleviate some of the problems I've just outlined (lack of health and education facilities in the rural areas).

"It was mentioned that the pipeline construction would probably, among other things, hurt our Native culture. Looking at the positive side, I say that it may help our Native culture."

"I will end by saying that the construction of the pipeline is very important to the economic growth of all Alaska for all Alaskans, native and non-native."

Sen. Ted Stevens (R-Ak)... "Failure to meet increasing demands for energy could cripple the nation's social and economic growth."

"In addition to its national impact, North Slope oil can help Alaska solve its "Massive Problems."