

MINTO SUPPORTS OIL PIPELINE



SUPPORTS PIPELINE—Minto villager Richard Frank, who represented his village at Washington, D.C. environmental hearings, explains why his people voted to support oil pipeline con-

struction if their stipulations on payment to the Native people for oil damage to their livelihood are met.

—Photo by MADELYN SHULMAN

Seeking Stipulations For Bonded Protection Against Line Breakage

By MADELYN SHULMAN
Staff Writer

The village of Minto has voted to support the construction of a trans Alaska pipeline if the pipeline company agrees to stipulations for a bonded guarantee of the safety of the environment.

The statement of support was announced in Fairbanks Friday by Richard Frank, who represented the village at the U.S. Interior Department Environmental Impact Hearings in Washington, D.C.

"We the native people of Minto, upon a majority vote, have agreed to take the unified stand that we are for the construction of the pending pipeline, with certain stipulations that all native Alaskans (Indians, Eskimos, Aleuts) be bonded and compensated—by a written guarantee (to hold)—for the safety and security for our protection in the event of a breakage of the pipe line.

"This guarantee must also cover the conservation of the wild life, the land, the waters, during the entire duration of operation of the pipe line.

"For the guarantee of employment on a first priority basis of all Alaskan Natives. We propose that all Alaskans support this as a unity for all Alaskan well being."

"We decided we owe it to

the general public to take a position for or against the pipeline," said Richard Frank.

White Alaskans are now feeling the pinch of unstable economics," said Frank. "We've lived with this year long, 365 days per year, in the outlying areas.

"With guarantees of safety
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Minto Supports Pipeline

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and a bond between the native people and the pipeline company, we are for it (the pipeline)," said Frank.

The people of Minto believe other villages and Native groups should announce their position—whether they support or oppose the building of the trans Alaska pipeline and if so under what conditions.

The people of Minto fear, however, that oil development will irreparably damage their hunting grounds in Minto Flats just as gold dredging did thirty and fifty years ago.

At that time, silt began to build up in the flats, destroying the habitat of much of the fish and wildlife from which the people of Minto take their subsistence.

"We experienced the aftermath of the gold industry and don't want to go through that again," said Frank. "After the gold industry, nothing was left behind for employment."

"The oil company should leave some kind of perpetual income to the people," suggested Frank.

He said this could be in the form of educational programs, training facilities. One suggestion was scholarships or training programs to create Native geologists, and other oil experts—specialties which require years of expensive training. Jobs for just the three years of pipeline construction, says Frank, are not enough return for the oil.

"Times have changed since the gold industry time," he explained. "At that time, you could live off the land. Now, you live partly off cash income, a percentage from subsistence."

This trend is increasing, he said. Cash income is already a necessity and some means must be found to generate it.

Richard Frank, who replaced Village Chief Peter John as Minto's representative to the Washington, D.C. pipeline hearings, went to New York on the way back to Minto to "see what will happen in Alaska."

The money to pay for a Minto representative to go to Washington was donated by two unidentified Eastern women. Shortly before he was scheduled to leave, 70 year old Peter John decided the trip would be too taxing and the council appointed Richard Frank.

Frank had never been in Washington and New York, found it

interesting and exciting. He sampled the city of N.Y. from Times Square to Harlem, Greenwich Village to Park Avenue.

"In comparison," he commented, "I'd rather go back home. It's the last frontier, a tradition."

However, the problems his people face, he fears, are completely foreign to the men who make decisions in New York and Washington.

On Wall Street, the financial heart of New York, Frank said you could visibly see the vast differences between these people and the Natives in the villages.

In the teeming crowds of Wall Street beneath the rows of skyscrapers, what impressed him was that all those men in business suits were working—more jobs than he had ever seen at one time.

"Those men in Washington have to educate themselves on what they're really talking about—the totally unemployed people here in Alaska."

Total unemployment, no cash income, hits the Native people hard, said Frank. He echoes from his own experiences and those of his people the figures that the Alaska Labor Commissioner repeated in Anchorage and Washington—many Alaskans have never had regular jobs.

"I don't see how the Interior Department could conduct a study and decide the oil companies should be under \$5 million bond to the U.S. government. It is the people who live in the area who will suffer from any oil spills.

"If the oil companies would agree to certain stipulations to guarantee a safe pipeline to the Native people and others in Alaska, the pipeline could be for the good of the people." Frank believes a safe pipeline can be built and that it is the best alternative open to the U.S.

The people in Minto are not unaware of what is going on in oil countries around the world. Richard Frank commented on the situation in Venezuela and the Middle East, limiting oil sold to the U.S. from these areas.

Canada, he thinks, could tax the pipeline also and lead to added expense.

However, he thinks the oil companies should return some income to the place where they are getting it—the center of Alaska.

"They should sow the seed where they got it from."