

# **The Air of Expectancy**

The preparation in Congress to settle Alaska's native land claims is beginning to be the focus of many eyes in the state. The native people and the Alaskan public as a whole will not be the only interested populace that will be watching. Much of the world might set their eyes on what will transpire in the Halls of Congress as it thrashes out the final settlement plan on lands and compensation for Alaska's native peoples who will be relinquishing their lands they have historically used for a return of a small percentage of them and for an economic base for their future.

The seriousness of the job on hand has begun to make itself felt by the ranking members of Congress. Things seem to be pointing to the fact that there is a sense of urgency and will to do a good job among the senators and congressmen. This development can mean that a foundation has been laid that no halfway measures will be made, thereby setting the stage for historic effort by the lawmakers to forge a settlement plan that could be leafed firmly in the pages of history.

This important development has its source—the surprisingly thorough job of selling the moral and legal status of the native land claims to much of the general public of the country by the Alaska Federation of Natives, its team of attorneys and many interested persons many of whom are prominent. This has been the revelation that the responsible segment of the nation's public has been aroused toward the urgency and need of settling the native claims equitably and generously. Such men as Sen. Henry M. Jackson of Washington State, especially as chairman of the important Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, can hardly ignore the public will.

The land claims solution effort by the native people and their friends has attained the high level of excellence in approach. It was done with dignity and with patience for detail. It was done with eloquence of speech by the well informed and articulate native leadership. It was done with sophistication little of which was expected of them.

The work of the proponents of the claims was done so well that it might be difficult to breach by the opposition. Much of the work was done many times under hostile conditions. It's a wonder that it was done at all to its present level of achievement. A great deal of soul-searching was entered into. It was difficult to stand tall under the circumstances. It was difficult to wade through the shallowness of opinions of those who opposed the native effort.

The search for justice has been well laid out by the leadership, their attorneys and their friends. How well the impression has been made will soon unfold on the floor of the Senate and later on the floor of the House of Representatives. The air of expectancy has set in among the native people and the Alaskan public in general. A considerable portion of the Lower 48 public is also very much aware of the land claims issue. Foreign countries that have their own aborigines on the lands they have conquered or

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moved into will be watching, let alone those aborigines or original inhabitants of those lands.

The Congress may well perform before one of its larger audiences in its history. How well it does with the issue at hand will be under watchful surveillance. Has the stage been set for a historic effort by Congress? The stuff with which to do it is there. Finest minds of the nation are there to tackle the problem. We also know they have the capacity for compassion and conscience for justice.