

# Senator Kennedy Addresses Senate on Native Land Issue

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy has urged the Senate "to make a fair settlement" of the native land claims issue before time runs out.

Addressing the senators in mid December, Kennedy said, "It is perhaps the nation's last, best chance to close with dignity and justice one of the sordid chapters in our history—our shocking treatment of America's first inhabitants."

The Massachusetts senator explained that if the 91st Congress does not act on the matter, the Department of the Interior has

indicated that it will, in effect, lift the current land freeze and continue the transfer of public domain land to the State.

After briefly reviewing the background of the land claims situation, Kennedy turned to the bills designed to settle the controversy now before the Senate.

The most important of these, he said, was filed on behalf of the Alaska Federation of Natives.

"Alaska Natives seek justice, not charity," he continued. "They do not ask to be given lands, but they ask for the right

to retain a portion of that which belongs to them."

"They do not ask to be given money or compensation.

"But they ask as a matter of justice, that compensation be paid to them in return for their agreement to extinguish their aboriginal claims to vast portions of the state."

In its bill, the Alaska Federation of Natives is asking for formal legal title to 40 million acres, \$500 million in cash, and a 2 per cent royalty on the gross rev-

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# Kennedy's Speech

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venues from federal and state oil and gas leases.

Referring to his visits to the villages of Alaska in April of 1969, the senator said, "I learned something about the special meaning of the land to the Native people."

Kennedy made the visits in connection with his work with the Senate Subcommittee on Indian Education.

"Young and old," he said, "they are of one mind: the land is their life."

"It is the foundation of their rich and varied cultures. It is a powerful source of their pride as a people. Ready to meet the challenge of the future in their rapidly changing world, they see the land as their best hope to participate in the economic growth of the state through rational commercial development."

The 40 million acres requested by the natives, Kennedy said, comprise only about 10 per cent of the 350 million acres to which they have a valid claim. The natives, he added, comprise about 20 per cent of Alaska's population.

"The majority of the natives will be in the villages for very many years," he said. "Many natives—particularly the elderly and those with very little education—would be destitute if, because of insufficient land, they were forced to move from their

"On the other hand," he continued, "if adequate lands are retained, the Natives will be able to make a meaningful choice be-

tween village life and urban life."

Concerning the administration of any land claims settlement legislation, Kennedy stressed that the Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Indian Affairs must be removed from control over Native lands and funds "if we are not to repeat in Alaska the mistakes made in the rest of the United States which seem destined to plague us yet for years to come."

Expressing his pleasure that all the bills now before Congress call for the creation of an Alaska Native Commission and an Alaska Native Development Corporation, Kennedy charged that the record of the BIA and the Department of the Interior in Alaska is "marked by inertia, lack of imagination, paternalism, the frustration of Native aspirations and, in general, a complete lack of identification with, or sympathy for, Native rights and needs."

Kennedy further urged the Senate to make sure that the legislation not only creates new institutions, but that it also gives the Natives themselves a meaningful role in the decision-making process.

The Senate has an opportunity to make a fair settlement in accordance with our nation's high ideals, he concluded.

And, if it fails to act, the senator continued, the Alaska natives will lose their rights to millions of acres of land which are rightfully theirs.