

letters

Seiberling responds to Hickel

Dear Editor:

Recent statements by governorship candidate Walter Hickel, as reported in Alaska newspapers, are so misleading insofar as they concern H.R. 39, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, that I believe it only fair to your readers to set the facts straight.

Mr. Hickel is quoted as saying that legislation such as H.R. 39, which would implement section 17(d)(2) of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, "threatens to destroy the great achievement of All Americans who fought for that settlement," and that "with millions of acres placed in wilderness, there may be no access to great sections of Native land. This would strangle Native corporation enterprises...the issue is whether the Natives themselves will be locked in." If Mr. Hickel is attempting to describe the provisions of H.R. 39, he could not be more in error.

Throughout our hearings and town meetings in Alaska, the question of access was clearly and forcefully presented to our Subcommittee, and H.R. 39 as passed by the House of Representatives on May 19, 1978 is explicit in providing that the new and expanded conservation system units—including wilderness areas—will not prevent continuation of established patterns and modes of access, either to and from Native lands or to the rest of the State. Thus, section 1102 (b) mandates that the Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture "shall permit the continuation of customary patterns and modes of travel across such units...conditioned by such reasonable regulations as the Secretary [after notice and hearing] shall promulgate to assure that such travel is consistent with the purposes for which such unit was established." Furthermore, with specific reference to the fact that some State and private inholdings—including Native lands—will exist within the boundaries of some of the units, section 1102 (c) (which was included at the suggestion of members of the State Legislature's "D-2 Steering Council") provides that "In any case in which State owned or privately owned land (including Native land) or a valid mining claim or other valid occupancy is effectively surrounded by public lands within one or more conservation system units [again, this includes wilderness areas], the State or private owner or occupier shall be given by the Secretary such rights as may be necessary to assure adequate access for economic and other purposes to the concerned land by such State or private owner and their successors in interest. Such rights shall be subject to reasonable regulations issued by the Secretary to protect the values of such unit or units."

In short, far from cutting off access to Native lands—or to any other State or private lands, for that matter—the D-2 bill expressly requires that they be given access.

Mr. Hickel, discussed also the future taxability of Native lands, and implied that H.R. 39 would threaten the policies of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. In fact, however, the problems suffered by the Native corporations as a result of delays in receiving the lands promised them have been a matter of great concern to the Members of our Subcommittee. After a series of hearings on this problem, the Subcommittee felt strongly enough about this matter to include numerous provisions (in Title VIII) designed

to speed up the transfer of their lands to the Natives. Furthermore, section 804 of H.R. 39 as reported would amend the Settlement Act to provide that undeveloped Native lands will not become taxable until 20 years after title to the lands is actually transferred to the Native corporation. Section 806 would establish a "Land Bank" program under which the Native corporations could exempt their land from all taxation in return for agreeing with the State concerning the future use of the lands.

So, again, H.R. 39 as reported would advance, not hinder, the proper fulfillment of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

It may be inevitable that the "D-2 issue" will be dragged into the current political campaign. However, it is important that the record not be distorted concerning just what our Committee has done in considering legislation to implement and further the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, so that Alaskans can make their decisions on the basis of facts.

Sincerely,
John F. Seiberling
Chairman, Subcommittee on
General Oversight &
Alaska Lands

Tlingit language

Dear Editor:

We are proud to announce that we have completed a four week course in beginning Tlingit. For many of us this has been our first opportunity to learn our Native language.

Upon evaluating the course and instructor, Nora Dauenhauer, we found that we had

all benefited individually and as a group as a result of taking this class.

Participants included children, teenagers, and adults. In this unique classroom setting we were able to learn at our own pace. Those who mastered a particular lesson assisted others during the sessions.

In addition to teaching us the language, Nora included lectures on material relevant to our traditional culture such as our complex kinship system, the meaning of the potlatch, and stories that have been handed down from generation to generation. This aspect of the course has encouraged some individuals to try and trace their roots. Others would like to begin interpreting legends and stories.

This course has given us a sense of pride and identity. It has especially helped the younger people understand and appreciate their Native background.

A major concern to all of us is our inability to converse fluently with our elders. Many of our relatives have already died taking with them wisdom, legends, stories, and the sadness of knowing that what they had to offer was lost forever. This realization has made us aware of our responsibility to learn our language and preserve our cultural heritage. Therefore, we feel there is a definite need for an intermediate course in Tlingit. Our goal is to become bilingual and insure that it is passed on to our descendants.

In concluding our evaluation, we would like to express our appreciation to Nora for her patience and willingness to share her knowledge with us so that one day our Native language will become an integral part of our lives.

Patricia Helle
Sitka