

# TESTIMONIES FAVOR AFN BILL

## Overwhelming Support For Measure Brought Out at Land Hearings

The House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs ended its week-long tour of Alaska Saturday after conducting two days of field hearings, both in Fairbanks and Anchorage.

During the Friday hearings in Fairbanks, the congressmen heard testimony which was mostly favorable to land claims legislation proposed by the Alaska Federation of Natives.

The Alaska Natives who had testified largely emphasized two points. One, that the native position in the claims requested minimal compensation.

They told the committee that the AFN request for 40 million acres of land, \$500 million cash settlement, and a two per cent overriding royalty is just and perhaps barely sufficient.

### COMPETENCE

Secondly, native witnesses impressed upon congressmen that Alaskan Natives have demonstrated competence and have established valid priorities in the

use of settlement proceeds.

Native witnesses who had come to the Fairbanks hearings from a number of villages in interior and Northern Alaska illustrated that, under the AFN figure of 40 million acres, the villages would receive only from 5 to 10 per cent of the lands they do now use and occupy.

Many of the witnesses testified as a delegation representing their village. They presented to the committee maps illustrated with trap lines, family cabins, fishing camps, and timber-harvesting areas to illustrate the land used to support their village.

In each case, the land which they used was significantly larger than that which they claimed through the AFN.

Other native witnesses, from both urban areas and the villages, testified as to the competency demonstrated by Alaska Natives. They represented a broad cross-section of native businessmen, teachers, politicians, and natives engaged in other professions.

### POSITIONS OF RESPECT

Each of these indicated that they and other Alaska Natives,

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CONGRESSMAN ASPINALL—The usually stern and crusty individual, Congressman Wayne Aspinall is caught by the camera in a lively and smiling encounter with the Tlingit Indians in

their tribal regalia in Juneau last week during the fact finding and land claims hearing tour of the state by the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs of which Aspinall is chairman.



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although handicapped by lack of financial resources to obtain adequate education and health care, were able to achieve positions of respect and responsibility.

They appealed that, whatever the size of the settlement awarded through the land claims, Alaska Natives be allowed to manage their own affairs independent of extensive state or federal control.

Limited opposition came from a small number of witnesses, who spoke as individuals and represented no organizations in any official capacity.

Each witness was allotted five minutes of oral testimony and permitted to submit additional written statements to be entered into the records of the hearings.

Although Chairman Wayne Aspinall, (D-Colorado), was present, Rep. James Haley, (D-Fla.), chaired the hearings. Haley, chairman of the House Subcommittee on Indian Affairs, was repeatedly apologetic that the committee's schedule did not permit more oral testimony by native witnesses.

The five-minute limit imposed at the Fairbanks hearings was decreased to three minutes during the Anchorage hearings on Saturday.

In Anchorage, testimony on behalf of the Alaska Federation of Natives was spearheaded by AFN President Emil Notti.

## NOTTI DEFENDS

Notti defended the three provisions of the AFN bill. He stated that the 40 million acres requested by AFN was a "minimum amount of land" and would provide a "base for moving into the mainstream" for Alaska Natives.

It would also insure that, for those who would choose to do so, Natives would be able to continue living off the land.

Notti described the \$500 million cash settlement as barely reasonable and based on \$1½ per acre for native land.

The 2 per cent royalty, Notti noted, "would provide a means of preventing our people from coming back to congress in future generations."

He renewed the native plea for self-control of the proceeds from the settlement, stating, "We need to be able to determine our future and . . . we have the competence to do so."

The AFN chief said the native bill called for regional corporations so that it may "bring the administration closer to the people."

## LAND, MONEY IMPORTANT

In questioning, Notti was asked by Rep. John Saylor (R-Penn.) whether he favored more emphasis on land or money. Notti said they were both important.

"The money is needed now," he said, "and the land for the future."

President Notti was followed by John Borbridge, Jr., president of the Tlingit and Haida Central Council. Borbridge impressed on the committee that, with Alaska natives, there has been no extinguishment of native title.

He pointed out that, as in other native regions in Alaska, the Tlingit and Haida Council has formed a corporation and is ready to compete in business interests.

"We are coming in now," Brobridge stated.

Other significant testimony was entered by Agnes Brown and Fred Bismark, representing the village of Tyonek. They explained that, when oil reserves were discovered on the Tyonek Reservation, the Interior Department authorized competitive leasing.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs, they explained, wanted the Tyonek Indians to approve all lease bids. The Tyoneks held out until they were given the right to manage their own affairs.

Universally acclaimed as a great success story, the Tyonek Indians not only vastly improved their living conditions but also compete in a number of business ventures.

Rep. Ed Edmondson (D-Okla.) asked Bismark if the rest of Alaska Natives would be able to repeat the Tyonek success.

"I think that they are all capable," Bismark replied.

He pointed out that Alaska Natives, as did the Tyoneks, would be able to hire any necessary expert advice required to manage the monies and lands from the settlement.

## CAUTIOUS SUPPORT

A cautious note of support for the native position came from a delegation of witnesses representing the Alaska Miner's Association.

They pointed out that Alaska Natives justly deserve the land and money which they request, yet they warned that withdrawing large tracts of land for selection by Natives would tie-up land for years and drastically hurt the state's economic development.

## MINERS TIE UP LAND

Countering this allegation in his testimony, State Representative Willie Hensley (D-Kotzebue) told the congressmen that mining interests have tied-up land in much of Alaska for years, and have contributed to slowing economic development.

The miner's association has indicated support for the native position, particularly emphasizing that Natives should manage their own affairs.

A small vocal minority within the organization has opposed many aspects of the settlement, yet it is reported that the association would probably continue support of the native position in thinking that the settlement would eventually benefit Alaska industry as well as Alaska Natives.

The opposition that has been generated within the state, although it may be threatening, is expected to have no great effect on land claims legislation.

## ANGER THAN RESPECT

It is reported that the Miller Administration's argument that the federal government has no power to allow the state to participate in a land settlement is drawing more anger than respect.

It is increasingly felt that the opposition voiced by Miller, Rep. Pollock, and Senator Stevens is serving more to enhance the popular image of the state as a greedy organism which is more sympathetic to filling the state coffers than listening to its native population.

Conspicuous in its absence, the only representative of the state during the hearings was assistant attorney general Robert Price, who sat as an observer toward the rear of the auditorium in Anchorage.

## CONSERVATIONIST THREAT

The only threat to a favorable settlement of the land claims is yet dormant. It was pointed out by several of the Congressmen, including Chairman Aspinall, that active opposition to a land grant may come from powerful conservationist lobbyists.

Under the AFN bill, Alaska Natives will be allowed to select lands from within the national forests and parks. In some cases, such as in Southeast Alaska, there is no other land available for selection by villages.

It is thought that conservationist groups may oppose such selections.

In consideration of the entire land claims issue, the House hearings were thought to further the native position. Generally, native witnesses gave very effective testimony which was, for the most part, favorably received by the committee.