

Natives Lobby For Pipeline In Wash. D.C.

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A group of veteran Native lobbyists descended on Washington D.C. this week to support the latest trans-Alaska pipeline legislation.

State Sen. Willie Hensley, president of the Alaska Federation of Natives, Inc. and one of lobbying group, predicted it was going to be rougher than usual

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this time, when debate began Monday in the U.S. Senate on the Jackson Bill.

Hensley, executive director Sam Kito of Doyon Ltd. and John Borbridge, president and chairman of the board of Sealaska Corp. left Saturday night from Anchorage and planned to spend a week or so lobbying.

"They're going to be on the bill virtually all week," Hensley said. Senator Jackson anticipates a substantial number of amendments. "He's particularly concerned about the so-called Mondale amendment, which would require a trans-Canada route study prior to beginning construction of the Alaska line."

"From a Native standpoint and a state standpoint too for that matter, such a study could result in substantial delay of the trans-Alaska pipeline or perhaps no trans-Alaska pipeline at all. The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act essentially ties us to the tune of a half billion dollars to resource development," Hensley noted.

The Jackson bill was to be the first order of business in the U.S. Senate Monday. Some members of the Senate Interior Committee predicted it would be in the Senate for at least a week.

The Jackson bill proposes broad new powers for the Interior Secretary to grant all types of right-of-way across federal lands, with the stipulation that the Secretary follow specific guidelines and rules in reviewing applications for such rights of way.

Most important, the bill would lift the 50-foot right-of-way width limitation contained in the 1920 mineral leasing act.

But the Jackson bill would

not prevent continued litigation over complex environmental issues that have been part of the prolonged lawsuit over the pipeline.

In addition to the Mondale amendment, there is one by U.S. Sen. Mike Gravel, D-Alaska, which would declare environmental requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) have been met and order the pipeline built.

Gravel talked last week with Speaker of the House Carl Albert, D-Oklahoma, about the

prospects of getting his amendment through the House. Albert noted that the house is an independent body and that rejection of that amendment by the U.S. Senate would not necessarily preclude its chances in the House.

At St. Louis, Mo. later in the week, Albert predicted that Congress will authorize construction of the trans-Alaska pipeline. Albert said he favored that route because it would relieve the current fuel shortage for the rest of the nation.