

NIXON PENS BILL INTO LAW

'I Want You to Be Among the First to Know...' Nixon Says

By MADELYN SHULMAN
Staff Writer

In a ceremony marked only by a special taped message to the convention of the Alaska Federation of Natives the President of the United States signed the Alaska Native Claims Act of 1971 into law shortly before 1 p.m. Alaska Standard Time, Saturday, December 18, 1971.

Standing motionless, over 600 delegates to the Anchorage Convention of the AFN listened to President Nixon's brief message:

"I appreciate this opportunity to present my greetings and best wishes to the convention of the Alaska Federation of Natives. I want you to be among the first to know that I have just signed the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

"This is a milestone in Alaska's History and in the way our government deals with natives and Indian people. It shows that institutions of government are responsive.

"As we developed this bill, Vice President Agnew and I were in close consultation with your president Don Wright. Don Wright ably and vigorously represented you in Washington. My congratulations go also to

Senator Ted Stevens, to Wally Hickel, to those of both parties who helped. Best wishes in your convention."

The President's message came just a brief hour after delegates to the AFN Convention voted 511 to 56 to ask that the President sign the bill—which provides for a 40 million acre land settlement, almost one billion dollars in federal appropriations and proceeds from a 2 per cent mineral royalty.

In a vote taken by regions, the Arctic Slope Native Association and the AFN Washington chapter voted No. The vote was anticlimactic. Most native delegates seemed partially pleased over the bill—partially disappointed—partially bewildered as to where to go next now that this fight is over.

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RISE NOW FOR THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES—AFN delegates stand to listen to a message from President Nixon saying he has just signed the Alaska Native Claims Act. In the lower left hand corner stands former Governor of Alaska and former U.S. Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel. Next to him is Howard Rock, editor of the TUNDRA

TIMES. After the President's message, which congratulated Governor Hickel and Alaskan Senator Ted Stevens, those two dignitaries addressed the convention.

"I still say the Alaskan natives have no legal rights to the land," Hickel said, "What they have is a moral right."

President Signs Bill...

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Following the President's speech, ex-governor and ex-Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel, AFN President Don Wright and Senator Ted Stevens (R-Alaska) gave speeches to the convention.

"The native people did not have a legal claim, they had a moral claim," said Hickel.

"We're starting on a new era—the post settlement era," said AFN President Don Wright. "By no means is it over, it's just beginning," he said.

Senator Stevens defended the "secret meeting" two weeks ago at which he, Congressman Nick Begich, Senator Gravel and Governor Egan came together to devise an Alaska Delegation position which they would present to the whole Conference Committee.

"I'm hopeful that all of you realize the somber duty you have," Stevens said. "In recent history there has not been a settlement of this type that does not require a plan submitted in advance to Congress or to the Secretary of the Interior."

"You will carry the burden not only for your grandchildren to come but for those Indian groups in the lower 48 that still seek settlement of their claims. The eyes of the nation will be on you as you acquire substantial assets and manage your own affairs."

"There are things in this bill that some of you do not like. Some of them I put there," Stevens said.

"With that he defended provisions of the act which provide that 10 per cent of the money received by regional corporations must be distributed per capita on an annual basis.

The purpose of this, Stevens claims, is that the native old people can see something of the land settlement today—not wait for the future.

"God guide you and God bless you and please remember those that will come after you and those that came before you," he ended.

The two native associations who voted against the bill have serious reservations about it. The Arctic Slope Native Association sent a protest telegram to President Nixon on Saturday.

According to the provisions

of the Act, Petroleum Reserve No. 4, the North Slope Wilderness Refuges and the Prudhoe Bay Oil fields are all closed to native subsurface selections.

These provisions mean a cut off of revenue to these villages amounting to many billions of dollars.

Another strong protestor is the Washington Chapter of the AFN—which represents many Alaskan natives in the lower 48.

"The Act discriminates against the 13th region," commented George Walters, President of AFN Washington Chapter. Alaskan natives living outside Alaska may choose to enroll back to their native regional corporation or to form a 13th corporation.

Such a corporation gives them control (on a per capita basis) over money, but no access to land.

Earlier Saturday, Emil Notti, past president of the AFN told the convention about the days when the AFN began.

"I wrote to people we didn't know," he told the group, "people like Willie Hensley. One of the early supporters was Howard Rock who gave us publicity in the TUNDRA TIMES.

There have been many sacrifices and great expense to many people." Among the people he saluted, no longer with us, were Nick Gray, Wilma Ketzler Albert Kaloa.

Willie Hensley, Notti related, took out a 10,000 life insurance policy and made AFN the beneficiary. Delegates traveled to board meetings and conventions on their own time and money—before travel pay and per diem.

"What made us respectable," said Notti, "was when Arthur Goldberg consented to be our chief counsel." "When Arthur Goldberg, former Attorney General, former Justice of the Supreme Court came before Congress and said, 'I consider this a matter of National interest,' that made land claims serious."

"Then, the Federal Field Commission report was significant. I don't know of any of us have read that cover to cover but there is one line I remember,"

"It is conceivable that the natives can prove ownership of all of Alaska."