

# Gravel's TT Report

By Mike Gravel  
U.S. Senator, Alaska

Many of you have now received your first check as part of your share of the \$962.5 million Alaska Native Fund. That Fund, as you know, is an integral part of the Native Claims Settlement Act.

I've been receiving a lot of questions from people receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI), asking whether the money they are getting from the Alaska Native Fund will mean a halt in their SSI and other benefits.

## NO CONFLICT BETWEEN SSI AND SETTLEMENT ACT FUNDS

The answer is flat "no."

As a member of the Senate Finance Committee, I spent long hours, along with my colleagues, on the question of SSI. We produced a bill to extend SSI benefits until the end of year — more than 400 aged, blind, and disabled Alaskans faced an immediate cut-off of federal payments without that bill.

It passed by an overwhelming 80 to 0 vote.

And we worked closely with H.E.W. and other agencies, to make sure that any gains for Alaska's Natives would not be wiped out by reductions in other areas. During the final debate on the claims payments, I specifically requested that H.E.W. not count the payments from the Alaska Native Fund as individual income.

I'm pleased to report that the Department of Health, Education and Welfare has agreed to my request. H.E.W. will not include Native Claims Fund in their calculations, when they figure out whether families are entitled to federal assistance.

So if you have been receiving SSI and also obtained your individual check from the Native Fund, you can be sure that there will be no change in the level of your Supplemental Security Income checks.

## NATIVE FUND BONUS

A second specific request which I made — this one to the Treasury Department — was that the Alaska Native Fund, like all other investments, be allowed to collect interest. At that

point in time, the Fund was being held in an "interest-free" account!

After a brief struggle, the Treasury Department agreed that the Native Fund is in fact eligible for interest payments — just as Congress had originally intended.

About \$6 million in interest has already accumulated on the basic \$962.5 million Fund. Thus, Alaska Natives will get full title and control of this \$6 million "bonus."

Other Alaskans have been asking me about their Aid to families with Dependent Children (AFDC) checks. The same is true of AFDC payments as with SSI. Income gained from the Native Fund will not be counted when H.E.W. computes the level of AFDC payments.

There will be no cutback or halt of AFDC or SSI payments for anyone receiving checks from the Alaska Native Fund.

## OUTSIDE ADDED INCOME

This does not mean, however, that income earned on the original Native Claims check will not be counted. In other

words, if you invest your Native Fund Check and receive interest or dividends, for example, then the interest or dividend will be included in the determination of eligibility for SSI or AFDC.

## OTHER QUESTION?

This whole problem can become complicated and somewhat confusing. If you're still not clear on your individual situation, please write me at 4107 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. I'll try to answer your questions and supply help in these and other matters.

In the meantime, I hope I'll be seeing a lot of you during my stays here in Alaska. I enjoyed talking with the participants at the Native Olympic Games and at last month's Chugach Native Regional Corporation's 'stockholder' meeting and banquet in Anchorage, and at the NANA Native Regional Corporation meeting in Kotzebue. I've learned quite a lot from your comments and recommendations.