

POACH 6
Juneau, Alaska 99901

RASMUSON RECRUITING FOR ENDORSEMENT TRY



TANANA CHIEFS— The Tanana Chiefs Conference has been in session this week preparing matters of concern to be presented at the annual Alaska Federation of Natives conference that will start tomorrow morning at the gymnasium of the Barnette Elementary School in

the city. Some 30 delegates attended the Chiefs conference chaired by Rep. John Sackett. Sackett, center, is being assisted by well known native leader, Ralph Perdue, left.

—TUNDRA TIMES Photo

Native Leaders Reportedly Lining AFN Delegate Strength

Alaskan Natives converged on Fairbanks today for their Federation Convention, and the major issue facing them today appeared

to be the question of endorsing political candidates.

Most leaders are agreed that the Federation should endorse Native candidates seeking office around the state, but the center of controversy now revolves around the U.S. Senate race between Elmer Rasmuson and Mike Gravel.

Rasmuson, a Republican banker who has been termed the wealthiest man in Alaska, has reportedly hired several influential Natives to help him get support. These include Jim

Thomas of Cordova, a Tlingit; Fred Notti, an Athapaskan from the Kuskokwim area; Flore Lekanof, an Aleut from the

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Pribolofs; and Dan Lisbourne, an Eskimo leader from Point Hope.

Notti has been flying in all of westward Alaska lining up delegate strength for Rasmuson at the AFN Convention, giving Rasmuson, a Republican, the first major shot at a Native endorsement ever enjoyed by a member of his political party.

The Democratic Senate nominee, however, is Mike Gravel, the author of Alaska's Native Poor, an essay on poverty in the villages; Gravel, a Democrat, has enjoyed substantial support since passage of his regional high school program in 1966, a feat he accomplished when he was Speaker of the House.

In his only two statewide races, Gravel has polled 60% of the village vote, or better, because of this support. He is expected in Fairbanks Saturday, along with Rasmuson, to seek the endorsement.

Native leaders gathering here speculate that the time has come for the Alaska Federation of Natives to endorse statewide candidates. Proponents of endorsement are believed to be Rep. William Hensley, AFN President Emil Notti, Hugh Nichols, Alice Brown of Anchorage, and many others.

They emphasize that the real political strength of the Labor movement comes from the fact that it endorsed candidates at Conventions and through its political arm COPE. The same

kind of arm, they argue, should be set up to screen and endorse political candidates with creative programs for the villages and the Native people.

Spokesmen for Gravel said yesterday that they would vigorously seek the endorsement since Gravel's legislative record and his proposed Ten Point Program for Rural Alaska are strong arguments in his behalf.

"We have not had the money to fly around the villages and organize for an endorsement at this Convention," one spokesman said, "but we don't feel that the AFN will close its ears and eyes to our arguments....we have a man with a great record and great promise for the Native people," he said.

The same spokesman disclosed that Gravel would spend all of Sunday, Oct. 6, with Secretary of Interior Stewart Udall, discussing the Native Land Claims and traveling on the Yukon visiting Indian village people.

Asked what the chances of Gravel were at the AFN Convention, this spokesman said: "If the Convention decides to endorse, and if it comes down to issues ... village issues ... it won't matter how much organizing Mr. Rasmuson's people have done. Mike Gravel has support from both Republican and Democratic Natives, and I think we'll see that support come through."