

Other Voices—

Interventions

An interesting facet of life in Alaska today is that intervention into local affairs by one group, usually conservationists or federal officials, is greeted with cries of outrage and indignation, while the most flagrant intervention into the issues of the deepest long-range import to Alaskans are overlooked or treated as examples of good citizenship.

Two recent examples of the latter are the intervention by several oil companies in the North Slope Borough decision and the passage of the development cities legislation, in the current Alaska Legislature.

The oil companies are saying in their suit to prevent the formation of the North Slope borough as desired by the local inhabitants that the needs of local government in Alaska must be subordinated to the needs of the outside financial interests who hope to reap tremendous profits from the North Slope oil while paying a minimum in local and state taxes. The last things that these companies want is to have to deal with a local government entity which has the power to represent the needs and desires of the local inhabitants. The suit is nothing but naked economic imperialism of the most flagrant type. It has been relatively unnoticed and uncommented upon by the rest of Alaska citizens who are vehement in their desires for local government for themselves while equally ready to overlook those who would deny it to their fellow Alaskans.

Likewise, the development cities legislation is primarily designed to bypass local regional governments and to obviate the need for the creation of borough or city government in rural Alaska by creating local governmental entities that would be in large part under corporate control or at best more responsive to the needs of one developer than any government should be.

There can be little doubt that the existence of such legislation in the Alaska statutes will inhibit the growth of local government in the bush.

It is equally amazing that actions of such far reaching import would be undertaken without debate in the areas most affected and without serious consideration of its ultimate effect upon the successful implementation of borough government in village Alaska.

The question that naturally arises is, what concern is this of conservationists and environmentalists? The answer is that pollution control, successful land and resource planning, and every environmental concern must rest ultimately upon the involvement of a concerned government at every level. If Alaska's Natives are to be able to control their environment they must have governmental institutions through which to exercise their desires.

The federal and state government, no matter how concerned or well meaning, cannot take the place of a concerned local government in protecting an area from unwarranted or undesirable private and public projects. A classic example is the recent rejection of the freeway system by Anchorage. Eventually, the rejection of freeways had to institutionalize itself through some medium of government, in this case a triad of city, borough, and state officials working on a new plan.

It is inconceivable that the people of rural Alaska, the inhabitants of the unorganized borough, will be able to achieve a successful implementation of the land claims legislation if they cannot develop local governments or if their local governments are compromised and inhibited by such policies as that which led to the development cities legislation. There is nothing in the provisions contained in that law for land planning controls or resource regulation that could not be achieved by a borough government operating under the same state guidelines that govern all boroughs in pollution control, land planning, or other areas of environmental concern.

It is high time that outside developers were taken to task and called upon to justify their efforts to inhibit the growth of truly representative local government in Alaska.

(Courtesy of Anchorage Daily News)