

Sen. Stevens Criticizes Leaders Who Attack Administration Bill

While Alaskan native leaders meet in Juneau with Governor

Egan, all three members of Alaska's Congressional delegation have spoken publicly in past days in favor of land claims settlements of at least that provided in the Nixon administration land claims bill.

This bill provides for 40 million acres of land, \$500 million dollars over 25 years and mineral revenues percentage of up to \$500 million. The AFN position is that a land claims settlement should consist of 60 million acres, \$500 million and a per-

petual 2 per cent overriding royalty on mineral revenues.

Senator Ted Stevens (R-Alaska), in an interview Saturday with the Tundra Times, criticized Alaskan native leaders who attack the administration bill vehemently - not on the terms of the settlement - but on its distribution aspects.

"I would publicly urge everyone talking about this bill who wants it to pass to be positive and distinguish between compensatory and procedural aspects," he said.

These attacks, he said, can

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be used as ammunition by Congressional opponents of land claims legislation. A better way of commenting, he pointed out, has been shown by AFN President Don Wright, who consistently calls the administration bill a good base from which to work for a better settlement.

Senator Stevens defended the "one corporation" provisions of the administration bill as a device to simplify the passage of land claims legislation.

Nothing, he insists, in the distribution portions of the administration bill, precludes native groups from organizing distribution through whatever format they choose - including regional corporations.

"After the settlement is approved," Stevens explained, "any of the procedural aspects can be changed."

Any unequal distribution plan, he explained, should be decided by a vote of the beneficiaries of the legislation - the native people of Alaska.

"If the Congress must decide the management of land claims money we get tied up in minutia," Stevens said. He pointed out that the historical precedents upon which Congress bases its power to legislate land claims settlements may preclude decisions to distribute benefits unequally.

However, he said, many Indian tribes have developed their own distribution schemes for land claims moneys. He cited the Alaskan Tlingit-Haida Indians who provide money for education and other tribes who have set aside settlement money for the education of their children.

Congressman Nick Begich, in an interview in Washington, D.C. replied to an Anchorage Daily News story last week which speculated on reasons why Congressman Wayne Aspinall (D-Col.) has announced he will omit Begich from the Conference Committee on the land claims bill.

Aspinall, who is chairman of the House Interior Committee, has the power to assign Congressmen from his committee to work on the important Conference Committee which reconciles differences between House and Senate versions of legislation.

"The real reason is that Congressman Aspinall has never put a freshman member of Congress on a Conference Committee in 13 years," Begich said. According to the Daily News story, Aspinall's already announced decision not to put the Alaskan Congressman on a Conference Committee is due to his support of the AFN bill (introduced by Lloyd Meeds) rather than Aspinall's own land claims bill.

Begich said he did not believe Aspinall's announcement was due to his advocacy of the AFN bill.

"I think it shows that he is serious about getting the bill out as he is already selecting the Conference Committee," Begich said about the decision.

Meanwhile in Juneau, Alaskan native leaders are meeting with Governor Egan and Attorney General Havelock to try to obtain a state government endorsement of the AFN land claims bill.

The State Rural Affairs Commission, composed of 48 mainly native rural leaders, held its first meeting in Juneau on Monday afternoon. The Commission, which is composed of AFN leaders plus many others, endorsed the AFN position. They then began discussions with the Governor and Attorney General to try to obtain state support for their position.

After three days of Rural Affairs Commission meetings, the AFN plans a board meeting for Thursday and Friday of this week to discuss specific AFN business.