

AFN Public Relations Effort Accelerates in Lower 48 States

Alaska Federation of Native leaders recently intensified the land claims effort with full-time

representation in Washington, D.C. This became a reality with the arrival of Emil Notti, AFN

president, and John Borbridge, AFN first vice-president, late last month.

Other than meeting with congressional leaders, the duties assumed by the pair include a campaign to educate the American public to the case of the Alaska Natives.

This campaign has taken several forms—such as talks before interested groups, interviews with personalities of the news media, and television appearances. These efforts all indicate a more sophisticated approach by native leaders than ever seen before.

One aspect of such a campaign—television talk shows—is inevitable. So it was that on the evening of November 5, Notti and Borbridge traveled to Philadelphia to appear on one of the most popular talk shows in that area.

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Nationwide PR...

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The Jack McKinney Show, on Channel 29, signaled the beginning of barnstorming series of appearances for the native leadership.

The pair was given 30 minutes, following an interview of the victim of a beating and preceding a lady who is engaged in the manufacture and sale of aphrodisiacs.

McKinney, the interviewer, displayed interest in Alaska's budding oil industry and in the position of Alaska Natives. His provocative questions revealed advance study of the land claims issue.

"Are you seeking reparations for Alaska Natives," McKinney asked.

"The Alaska Native land claims are different than the claims made by our Indian brothers of the 'South Forty-eight.'

"In the continental U.S., the takings of land held by Indians came at a very early time. Alaska Natives assert rights to lands which can be measured in comparatively larger terms," Borbridge replied.

Notti feared that Natives would be pushed aside through rapid expansion in Alaska.

"What we want to see is, as the people are displaced, they should be able to receive compensation," he said.

Borbridge was quick to correct McKinney when the interviewer discussed the sale of Alaska by Russia: "That sale did not affect the status of the land."

The discussion shifted to reflection on the effort during organization of Alaska Natives and speculation as to the extent Natives will figure politically and economically in the future.

"Traditionally, the Natives who live in some 200 villages

throughout Alaska have been far removed from the cities, and from television and radio stations, and have been largely neglected," Notti noted.

"Now politicians are spending much time in the villages. True, much of the population is in the few larger cities, yet these are split almost evenly between Democrats and Republicans in elections. Natives often become the deciding factor," he said.

Since registration will be required beginning in 1972, Natives will have to start organizing and "making their political weight felt," Notti added.

McKinney asked Borbridge whether the land or money would be more important to Natives in the claims settlement.

"Both are important, although most Natives strongly feel money should not be stressed to the detriment of a land settlement," he stated.

Was there any bitterness because of the coming of the white man, McKinney asked Notti?

"No, there never has been. I believe this has worked against us. I think we welcomed non-Natives openly, and there has been exploitation," the AFN president stated.

Both leaders were asked to comment on the significance of the land claims, and the importance of a favorable settlement.

"Our brother Indians to the south have never been dealt with in fairness. Many of them feel, and hope, that the Indian will win one this time. We hope that this time the dealings will be more enlightened," Borbridge said.

"We hope the national conscience shall work in our favor, and that the Alaska Native land claims will become recognized as

an issue of national importance," Emil Notti concluded.

The appearance on the Jack McKinney Show is typical of the effort made by the native leadership to gain public support. The AFN leaders hope that, as their efforts intensify, public support for the native position will also intensify.