

AFN President Sends Year End Message

By EMIL NOTTI
AFN President

This special issue of the Tundra Times marks a first. For the Tundra Times it is the first time the newspaper voice of the Native peoples has been distributed throughout Alaska.

And for the Alaska Federation of Natives, this is the first time we have been able to reach all our brothers to talk about the most important event in the history of our peoples—the settlement of Native Land Claims.

I therefore welcome this opportunity to finally report to all of you about our activities these past momentous twelve months.

We began this year with the recognition by members of our board that unless certain goals were achieved, our historic rights

(Continued on Page 4)

AFN President Sends Message...

(Continued from page 1)

to the lands of Alaska would be seriously threatened and any chance for a fair settlement of our claims dangerously compromised.

Our goals were these: to secure a continuation of the land freeze pending a settlement; to retain men of stature, integrity and broad national reputation to help present our case to the Congress and the American people; to agree on an acceptable position fair to the interests of all Alaskan Natives; to mount an effective legislative campaign both in Alaska and the other 49 states; and to encourage the growth of the Alaska Federation of Natives in all its activities.

In January, John Borbridge, Willie Hensley, Eben Hopson and I flew to Washington to tell Congress of the importance of the land freeze, which by holding up the state's selection of lands had given impetus to our effort to finally settle once and for all the matter of Native rights to most of Alaska. We wanted to secure from the then Secretary of the Interior designate Walter Hickel a pledge for its retention.

With the help of friendly Senators and Chairman Jackson of the Senate Interior Committee we got that pledge—the land freeze won't be lifted until this session of Congress is through acting on our settlement.

Then in March, acting under Board authorization, we sought out the foremost lawyer in the United States, former Labor Secretary, Ambassador to the United Nations and supreme Court Justice Arthur J. Goldberg. Justice Goldberg expressed great interest and concern over our case and subsequently agreed to serve without pay as the chief counsel for the Native Peoples of Alaska.

He has been joined by his partner, former United States Attorney General Ramsey Clark, and former Senator Thomas Kuchel of California. These men in turn are aided by your regional Alaskan attorney.

We feel it is a measure of the rightness and seriousness of our cause that such men as Justice Goldberg, General Clark and Senator Kuchel are prepared to present our case to Congress and the American people and we feel that their presence is immeasurably enhancing our chances for a just settlement.

By early summer we were finally ready to hammer out an

Alaskan native position, acceptable to Indian, Eskimo and Aleut. After days of meetings we developed a proposal calling for 40 million acres of land, 500 million dollars in cash, regional corporations to manage these assets, and an overriding royalty of 2 per cent on the gross value of all the oil and gas developed from the land we are renouncing claims to.

The settlement we seek will not mean a cash payout to individual natives. While in the past this means quick money for some, in the end little is left for the future. The sad fact is, that the history of Indian claims through personal cash settlements has been an unhappy one.

Instead, we foresee through regional development corporations a chance to manage our settlement money for the benefit of all natives through, among other things, programs of education, health plans, job training, and business loans. At the same time each Native will hold shares of stock in these corporations and be able to participate in their management and enjoy the returns they bring, both financial and educational.

We chose this corporate method because we know our people can do the job. This is, first and foremost, our chance to manage our destinies freed from the heavy handed control of paternalistic but well meaning agencies. The future under our proposal will be ours to face. Our successes, and our failures, will be for the first time our responsibility.

This is the way it should be. We welcome the chance to finally meaningfully participate as equal partners in the growth of our state and Nation.

We have now taken our proposal to Congress. AFN Board members have testified many times this year before the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States. We have lobbied hard and effectively.

AFN representatives have spoken of our rights and future to opinion shaping audiences from France to Fairbanks. And, I think, we have had great, great success.

For example the 46 million member National Council of Churches recently unanimously resolved to urge their constituent groups to get behind our AFN settlement proposals and not just

any settlement scheme. This will have an extraordinary impact on the success of our legislative mission. And this is only the beginning.

I believe we have been able to educate Congress so effectively that when Governor Miller and certain business men in the state have attempted to undercut our efforts for a just settlement, they have helped our cause and hurt theirs.

The Congress of the United States today understands that the treatment of the Alaskan native has been a black mark on the history of the Nation. We believe they will not tolerate the development of an oil rich wealthy white Alaska from oil-bearing traditional native lands unless the Native peoples are compensated for their rights and permitted to share in this wealth.

Finally I can report that AFN headquarters has been growing. We now administer more programs for the Native peoples than ever before. In addition we have opened a legislative office in Washington, D.C. to follow our land claims bill and a special public relations office in Anchorage to tell our story throughout Alaska and the United States.

In these past 12 months we have achieved the program we only dared hope to accomplish what seems so long ago. The preliminaries are now over.

Next year we have only one goal—justice for the Natives through a generous and equitable settlement of our land claims.

After two hundred years of conquest, subjugation, and domination, a new era for the Native Alaskan is dawning. Our children's life, their hopes and expectations will be greater than ours, just as our exceeded our parents.

Their future should be a great one. But it can also be empty if Congress and the State of Alaska do not do justice and redeem their pledges.

To see this done we must stand together. Our ranks must not be broken, and our faith must not be shattered by disappointments along the way.

We must keep telling our message to Congress, we must keep informing our fellow Alaskans, we must keep the effort up with all the strength and courage, and fortitude that God gives us.

For we are right.