

Commission Bill Now In Hearings

Sweeping changes have been recommended during committee hearings on the the Native Affairs Commission bill.

The proposed changes involve the method of selecting commission members and setting up more concrete definitions of the formation and powers of the commission.

The bill, according to House Majority Leader Ted Stevens, is to enable the State to take

25 to 60 Natives to Washington for talks with congressmen and the Department of the Interior.

Representative John Sackett of Huslia reports that the bill is considered "urgent" in the State government, and some form of it will probably pass this session.

Although he favors the bill in principle, he told the House State Affairs Committee that it was "a poorly drafted bill."

"They must have been in a hurry," Sackett said. "They just threw everything in."

He and several other Native leaders asked that the State's Native associations have a hand in selecting the members of the commission.

John Coghill, representing the administration, said the governor would not object to selecting the commission from names provided by the Native organizations.

Sackett also recommended limiting the commission to about 25 members, which he felt would be enough to cover the entire State.

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Byron Mallot of Yakutat, a board member of AFNA, said the bill in its present form "is not acceptable to most of the Native groups."

He suggested that the AFNA board of directors might serve as the governor's advisory board on Native affairs.

Senator Bob Blodgett of Teller, after a series of interruptions, said that the commission might be a means of getting the administration off the spot for not appointing Native persons to boards and commissions.

The bill is still being considered by the committee, and chairman John Holm of Fairbanks predicted that some of the suggestions will be adopted as amendment to the bill.

Rep. Sackett said he felt the commission could be as effective as the Native leaders on it wanted it to be.

He said there were many areas besides land claims where more communication was needed between the Natives and State or Federal groups, and that the commission could fill this purpose until a well-thought-permanent solution could be created.