

CLAIMS BILL SAILS THROUGH

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Legislation in Congress: House, 307 - 16; Senate, Unanimous

By THOMAS RICHARDS, JR.
Washington Correspondent

WASHINGTON, D.C. (December 14)—The Alaska Native Land Claims Bill received final approval from the House and Senate today and was forwarded to the President for his signature.

The House approved the bill at about 3:30 p.m. with a vote of 307 to 16. One hour later, on a point of order by Senator Mike Mansfield (D-Montana), the Senate voted unanimous consent.

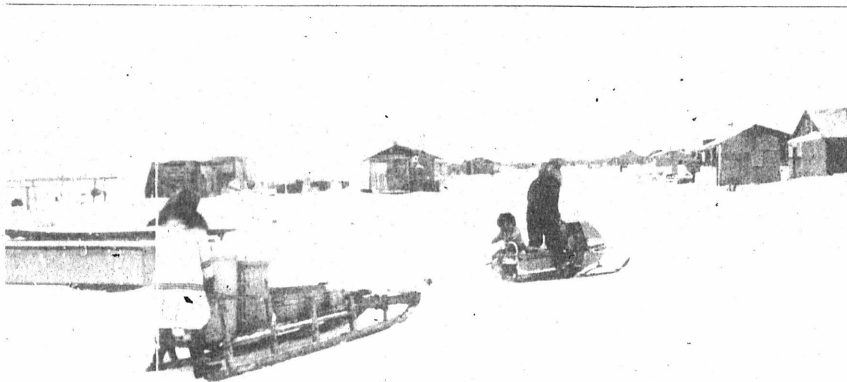
Forty million acres of land in simple fee title, \$465 million in federal appropriations and \$500 million in mineral royalty are provided in the legislation.

The timing for the passage of the bill this year was critical. Senator Mansfield moved to adjourn this year's Senate at noon Wednesday. The report of the joint conference committee on the land bill had been voted into print late Monday evening.

The vote for final passage was almost anti-climactic. Little opposition was voiced on the floor where discussion seemed limited to praise and recognition for individual Senators and Congressmen who worked on the legislation.

Less than one half dozen Alaskan Natives were present in the galleries to witness the final passage. Two members of the conference committee did note certain misgivings.

Senator Henry Jackson, Chairman of the Senate Interior Committee was disappointed in the 40 million acre figure. Smaller, but more valuable, land selec-



THE LAND—The village is very poor, but the native people in it have great love for the land on which their village has been built. This is what the claims fight had been waged for. The

AFN thinks the fight has been more than needed so the native people will live a better life from here on and into the future.

—UA MUSEUM PHOTOGRAPH

Bill Sails through...

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tions would have been more desirable, he said.

The Chairman was also disappointed in losing a battle in the conference committee for competitive leasing of land in Alaska. He also lost on provisions which would have established state-wide, urban and national corporations for management of settlement proceeds.

The only member of the conference committee who refused to sign the conference committee report was Representative John Saylor (R-Penna.). Saylor had previously attempted to block progress of the Conference Committee—an attempt thwarted by Chairman Wayne Aspinall;

At one point during the conference, Representative Saylor was the one member necessary to constitute a quorum. Stepping outside the committee room he asked Congressman Aspinall to call the quorum.

"I can't hear you," responded Aspinall.

When Saylor stepped back inside to repeat his request, the Chairman said,

"I call the quorum. You are the quorum."

The question of whether the provisions of the bill are acceptable to the Alaska Federation of Natives is expected to be decided this week when that body convenes on Thursday to review the bill.

The legislation provides nearly everything the AFN sought when it first brought its claim before Congress—40 million acres in fee, \$500 million in appropriations, the two per cent overriding royalty.

In a statement to the press today, AFN President Don Wright praised the members of Congress who worked on the bill—but left the question of acceptance by natives open. There are provisions in the bill

which had earlier been viewed as undesirable. The delegation to the convention will decide whether these drawbacks constitute grounds on which to request a presidential veto.

Some of the most significant provisions likely to be questioned by natives include the following:

- A 13th corporation in addition to the 12 regional corporations is established at the discretion of natives living outside Alaska. This could thin out village rolls and selections.

- Land selection must be contiguous to villages and limited to within 25 township withdrawals surrounding villages. No free floating selections are authorized with the exception of two million acres hardship cases.

- Reservations, with the exception of Metlakatla, will not have the option of retaining their land. They will participate in selections under the same formula as other villages.

- There is no provision for subsistence rights outside of the 40 million acres of land selected by natives.

- Control of revenues from corporate investments is more decentralized than desired by the AFN. Regional corporations are required to pass on 50 per cent of their profits to village corporations.

- Villagers will not be granted mineral rights in Naval Petroleum Reserve No. 4 and in wildlife refuges.

With those exceptions the AFN was largely successful during its lobbying efforts. In a sense natives were participants in the conference committee. Senator Mike Gravel maintained a continuing flow of information to the AFN throughout the meeting. The AFN was able to evaluate the proceedings and make its position known to the conferees.