

Early view of ANCSA

Reprinted from December 17, 1971 issue of Tundra Times.

EDITORIAL COMMENT—

By Howard Rock, Editor

The Claims Settlement

The 104-year-old Alaska Native land claims issue is apparently on the way to being settled by the government of our nation. Not everyone is pleased with the measure as it came out of the conference committee. Not all the Alaska Natives are happy. And great many of the general population of the state are not happy.

At any rate, significant history is being made, and it is in the process of being made. The important ingredients of this historic event are going to be the exemplary efforts of the Alaska Native leaders under the co-leaderships of the Alaska Federation of Natives' Presidents Emil Notti and Donald R. Wright. The initial leadership fell on the shoulders of Notti and the latter part fell on the shoulders of Wright in the dramatic five-year effort.

The input of the Native leadership in the highly complex claims issue has been of great magnitude. This amazing involvement has been done with no little skill on the part of the Native leaders. This spells strength of character, will and concern for their people of today and their people of tomorrow. Within a scant seven years, the leaders have come forward and quickly entered into the great and difficult problem. This also showed that they had talent to lead and to delve into the complexity of the task at hand. Along with this talent was the courageous attitudes and tenacity to stay on top of the problem. The work has been exhaustive and electric with emotion. It has been a thorough fight for justice as they saw it.

The fight for equitable settlement of the claims has been fraught with suspicions, charges that Alaska Natives have no rights to lands and other similar accusations. The Native leaders have had to endure these difficulties. Individual leaders, however, pretty much to a man, have not faltered. This is a mark of courage and dedication to a cause that would mean happier status of life among the Native people of Alaska.

Another great achievement Native leaders attained was the selling of their cause to the nation generally. Without this achievement, it would have been more difficult to sell the Native land claims issue to the Congress of the United States. In the process, the Native people of Alaska gained powerful friends among senators and congressmen, so much so that the passage of the claims bills in the House and Senate were overwhelmingly heavy on the "aye" side of the votes. Such legislative actions have carved out the situation we now have — the verge of a solution to a great problem.

If the bill is approved, or when it is approved, the President will, no doubt, sign it. That moment will be the beginning of a great era for the Native people of Alaska. It will not be an easy task. It will demand all the strength the leadership has. It will be a job for the present and more for the future of our Native people.

Let us recognize the task that will fall on our shoulders. It will test the strength of our leaders as well as the rest of our people. We also have proven that we can handle highly complex problems, such as the Alaska Native land claims. We must not do less in the future. We must meet it with confidence and then do more for the good of our people today and those of tomorrow.