First of a Series:

MIKE GRAVEL ON THE NATIVE POOR: Alaska's True Disgrace

EDITOR'S NOTE: This first installment of a six-part series serializes Mike Gravel's essay, "Alaska's Native Poor" in his new book, "Jobs and More Jobs". Former State House Speaker Gravel, known for his interest in rural Alaskan problems, was the originator and guiding force behind passage of the state's Regional High School bond issue in 1966. Now a candidate for the U.S. Senate, as well as an author, Gravel deals squarely with the problems of government and people in bringing an end to the poverty of Alaska's bush country.



STEVENS VILLAGE -These girls may never get a chance to go to high school.

By Mike Gravel

true disgrace - the poverty of not yet present. is Native people. This is a subject being treated to descriptive analysis by news media all over the State, and it is hoped that exposure of this problem has alarmed Alaskans in every city and village of the state. This essay attempts to augment that alarm.

To Alaska's Native people, the decade of the 1960's will probably be remembered as the time when their story was told, and when other Alaskans began to listen. But in the frozen hinterlands of rural Alaska, the 1960's will also be remembered as the decade of rising expectations and the decade of inadequate solutions. For in the 1960's, our Native people have felt their first successes, but also their first frustrations.

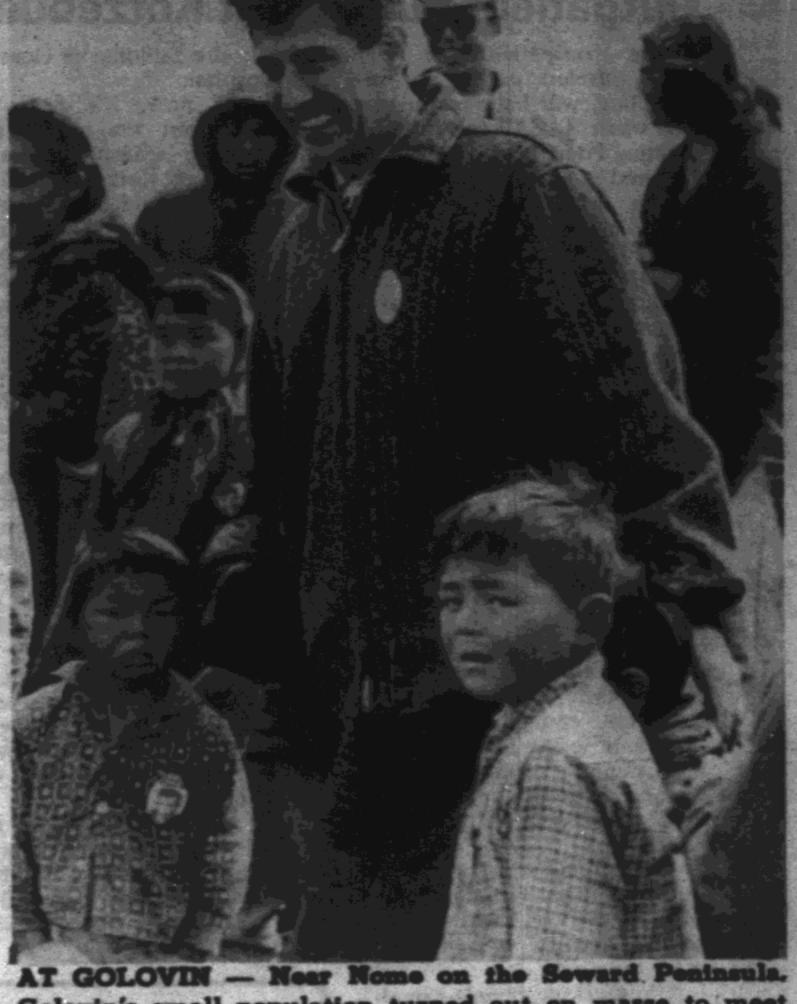
Indeed, it matters little how well that story has been told; and it matters little how inadequate the housing is, or the employment is, or the education is; and it matters but little that the conscience of Alaska and the nation has been moved by this story, since the struggle with life and the environment continues, unabated and no better. Alaska's Native poor are still

This essay deals with Alaska's elements for their renewal are

It is not the purpose here, and I should hope that it is unnecessary, to recite the appalling statistics of poverty in rural Alaska, in order to stir public sympathy. We have all been adequately startled. It is certainly more at issue to discuss what is being done, and under what pretense, what guise, in the name of pro- Alaska are completely unaware for something more satisfying. gress. Because progress is a very relative term.

Let me suggest, at the outset, that there has been a dramatic shift in federal and state policy toward rural Alaskan people in the last 5 to 10 years. But prior to these changes, there is a long history of vacuous bureaucratic thinking which is comparable only to the thinking of exploiters and colonialists, and this thinking was part and parcel of U. S. policy. But the Alaskan Natives refused to repeat the travesty of the United States Indian - and began to demand a change in those policies for themselves.

Yet today, some of these very same policies live on with us like the sins of another generation, in villages scattered all over Alaska. Those who deal Native is really in pretty good the Native people have been with rural problems either ac- shape, relatively speaking, and cept these policies or attempt to there is no sense getting excited Meanwhile, the population has



Golovin's small population turned out en masse to meet Mike Gravel in 1966. Here, he talks with youngsters in -Tundra Times Photo the village.

of them are based firmly on several presumptions, all of which are false, and these presumptions do not lend themselves to uproot. Native poor, prompting some of ing very easily. And many present-day policy-makers for rural ernment to give up the service of these presumptions, which form a pall around their judg- cant policy is that government ments, like subliminal advertis- agencies and programs, which ing. I am suggesting to those have been operating for years, people, like Louis Pasteur sug- do not need radical alteration gested to doctors years ago, that or redirection, but just need their greatest enemy is quite in- more money and people to work visible, and quite unrecognized for them. This is the game of

sembled four basic presumptions or so. which are presently playing roles in the continued formula- standardization, which is what tion of policy in rural Alaska, we are experiencing, is that where the bulk of our Native many government agencies oppoor reside. These presumptions erating in rural Alaska adopt the follow, with certain explana- "stand by and wait" approach,

Everything is Actually OK

sisting belief that the Alaskan

adjustments in the governmental framework will clear the problem up. However, it must be noted here that approximately

50 years of minor adjustments have been met with only worsening conditions among Alaska's the best administrators in gov-

The second and more signifi-"increased appropriation" played For these purposes, I have as- in Congressional halls every year

The consequences of programtions and, where necessary, com- in the hope that conditions will break their way. The result is that for all practical purposes There is the strange but per- the bureaucracy has become parasitic in some respects and made parasitic in other respects. work around them. Yet the bulk about solutions to problems that soared, aggravating the housing, have existed for centuries any- educational and health problems, and some vital areas of concern One of the basic policies evolv. have been left untouched and uning from this dream is that minor explored, as if they didn't exist.

> (To be continued, Next Week.)

Remember Mike Gravel?

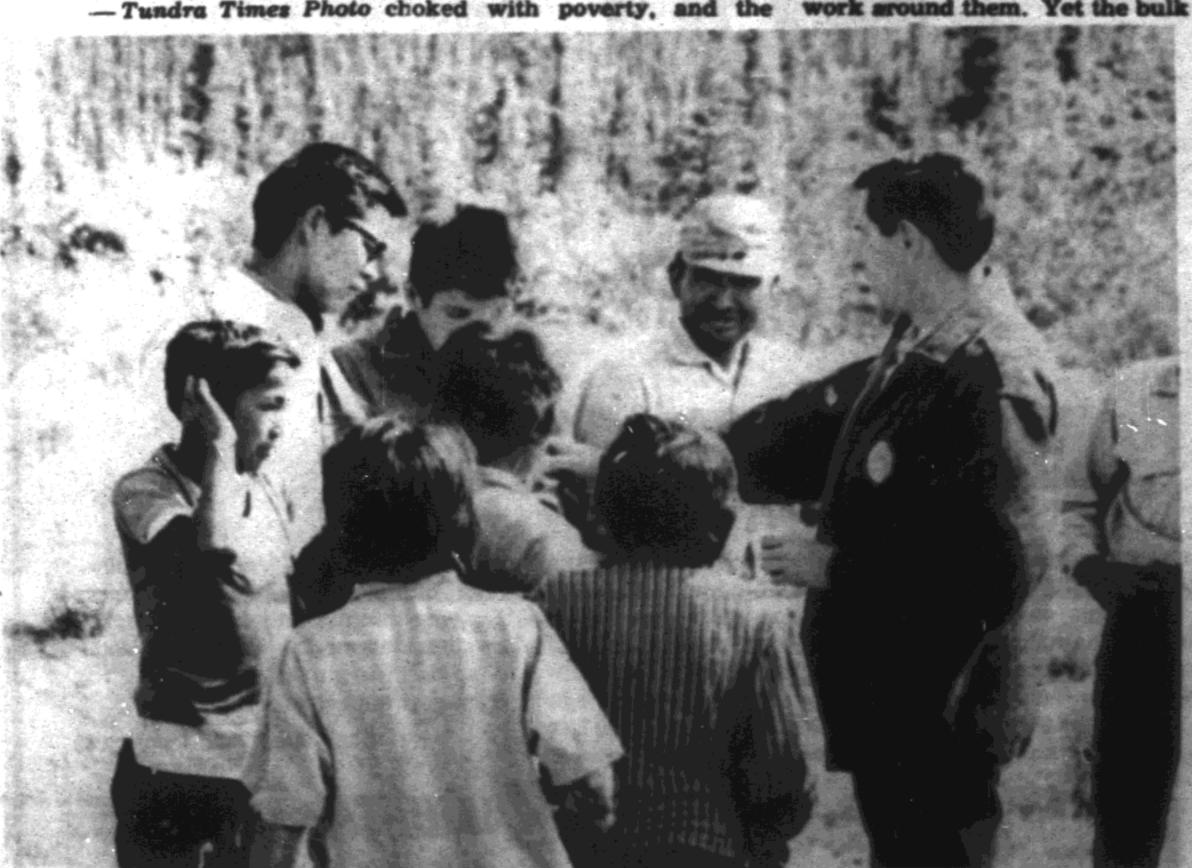
He's remembered widely in Alaska's bush country for his efforts in bringing regional high schools to rural parts of the state. While state House Speaker in 1966 Gravel became interested in the education and economic problems of Alaska's bush, and pushed through a \$5.6 million bond issue to meet the costs of the program. Many Alaskans also remembered Gravel for his wideranging, in-depth campaign through the state's rural re-gions in a 1966 bid for the U.S. Congress.

In the 1966 campaign, Gravel visited more villages and met more rural Alaskans than any candidate for of-fice in Alaska's history. Travelling by light aircraft from Yakutat to Kwethluk, to Mekoryuk, Noorvik and Gambell, Gravel travelled extensively to get a first-



Mike Gravel
hand look at Alaska's village

Now a successful Anchorage real estate developer active in a booming commercial and industrial growth on the Kenai Peninsula, Gravel wrote down his thoughts on Alaska's economic problems in a collection of essays, "Jobs and More Jobs" of which Alaska's Native Poor is a part.



AT KIANA - Mike Gravel meets and talks local problems with Kiana people during -Tundra Times Photo a visit to the Kobuk River community.