

**Editorial—**

## **Well Done, Begich...**

The effectiveness of Senator Stevens and Senator Gravel during the Alaska Native land claims fight is, at least, a highly controversial subject. There is much more agreement on the job done by Alaska Congressman Nick Begich on the House side.

When Begich arrived in Washington as a freshman congressman last year, the outlook for a fair and equitable land claims settlement was indeed bleak. Chairman Aspinall had proposed a bill which would provide less than 100,000 acres to Natives. The ranking Republican on the House Interior Committee, Rep. John Saylor of Pennsylvania, had angrily told lame duck Congressman Howard Pollock that Alaska would never receive a claims settlement out of that committee. The Alaska Senate delegation has predicted that the situation on the house side would prohibit favorable claims action.

Begich decided his first priority would be to work toward a settlement of the claims. He won friends easily among the House leadership, and was able to receive three committee assignments. The most important of these was his seat on the Interior committee, within that committee, he received an assignment to the Indian Affairs Subcommittee.

The freshman congressman was careful to attend every committee meeting, and over 98 per cent of the House roll calls. He hoped that, in working with colleagues from throughout the rest of the United States, they would be willing to give their attention to the settlement of the Alaska Native claims.

Averaging a seventeen-hour day, Begich was also careful to pay his respects to his colleagues. He called them before each committee meeting to ensure a quorum. He expressed his personal gratitude to them when they showed interest in the claims.

He won the respect of his colleagues. They began to share his belief that a fair and equitable settlement of the land claims was needed, and needed this year.

During an AFN meeting in Washington in mid-March, Begich told the group, "Timing is important. Don't pass judgement until you can judge properly. Give me a chance."

Begich masterfully executed his timing. The bill moved through the Indian Affairs Subcommittee, through the full House Interior committee, through the Rules Committee, and through the U.S. House of Representatives.

The House bill is less than what the AFN is asking. The split Native selection (18 million first for villages, 22 million after the state completes its selections) is undesirable. We hope that this can be corrected in the conference committee. But 40 million acres is a hell of an improvement over 80,000 acres—and this is a tremendous credit to Begich's efforts.

One veteran lobbyist was heard to comment, "It is the best individual achievement I have ever heard for a freshman congressman." We agree.

His persistence, and the atmosphere of honesty in which he worked, won the support of Chairman Aspinall and the House leadership—a well deserved support.

Well done, Congressman Begich.