

Editorial Comment—

Land Selection Priorities

The Alaska Federation of Natives Board of Directors and the Governor of the State of Alaska, William A. Egan, came face to face last weekend in Anchorage. The meeting was quietly dramatic. It was part of the guts work in the effort to resolve the mechanics of the Alaska native land claims solution. This one involved land selection priorities. Each entity—the AFN and the State—wants to be first in selecting lands after the claims is settled, the State to continue its selections after it has already selected some 17 million acres of prime land before the land freeze. The AFN hopes to have the first selection rights with the settlement of the claims—and, we think, rightly so.

The AFN is toiling with the unenviable job of relinquishing its rights to some 300 million acres of land the native people have been accustomed to using in the habitation of this northern land. In return for extinguishing of land rights, the statewide group is asking in return of land it deems is not even enough.

The powerful forces that are working for the right of the state to select lands first should also think back that the state already has had the privilege of having the first choice in selecting the initial prime 17 million acres of land. The AFN, we think, is actually not asking too much while relinquishing its rights to million and millions of acres of land. It is also a fact that the greatest portion of land selected will be around the immediate areas of villages, much of which the state would not want anyway.

We do not think the Alaska Federation of Natives is unreasonable in asking for the right to select lands first for its people. AFN is asking for greatest justice possible under the dire circumstances—the relinquishment and extinguishment of rights to lands.