

What Will Happen To the Settlement

All indications are that the land rights battle which has been waged by the Alaska Federation of Natives in Washington, D.C. may finally be drawing to a close. The U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate have already passed a Land Rights Bill. It is therefore quite conceivable that by the end of the year, there will be a Land Rights Settlement.

From information available at this time, it seems the final settlement will allow the Native people, through a number of regional Native corporations in the state, to retain title to 40 million acres or more of land and will also give them cash and royalties equal to the sum of approximately one billion dollars.

In this editorial, I would like to express my concern regarding some of the potential problems in a one billion dollar cash and royalty settlement.

One billion dollars is a sizeable sum and if used properly, the money could help alleviate many of the severe problems of poverty presently found in rural villages, but if it is spent unwisely, it could disappear in 10 to 15 years. It seems to me that the base capital of a billion dollars must remain and cannot be spent on projects or programs, unless such expenditures can increase the billion dollars. For instance, if the money is used for loans for businesses, the capital can be returned and the amount of money could grow from one billion to many billions of dollars.

The money could also be invested in banks, stocks and municipal bonds. These are all words foreign to most Alaska Natives, but are words they must learn the meaning of if they are to protect their Land Rights Settlement.

It is very discouraging to me to see the number of people, especially non-Natives, who have hypothetically

already spent the Native Land Claims Settlement. Many people in the state feel that once the settlement is made, Native people should install their own sewer systems, pay for all their health care, support the education system and supplement existing housing programs. If the money is spent in this way, the children and grandchildren of the Native people will truly wonder what happened to the Land Claims Settlement of 1971.

—JOHN SHIVELY