



AFN Delegation Seeks Land Selection Priorities

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A 14 man Alaska Federation of Natives delegation arrived in Washington this week to testify on the land claims issue.

The Washington delegation, led by AFN President Don Wright hopes to convince the joint Senate-House Conference Committee on land claims, scheduled to begin work this week, to give Alaska Natives first priority

in selection of land.

If they cannot achieve their minimum settlement of 40 million acres of land and primary selection rights the AFN will consider trying to kill a land claims bill this session of Congress.

"The minimum acceptable legislative settlement is 40 million acres in fee simple title with selection rights on the full 40 million acres which have absolute priority over additional selections by the State of Alaska or the Federal Government," according to a memo to the Governor released Sunday by AFN President Don Wright.

"If this minimum goal cannot be achieved in Conference," the memo continued, "the Natives will have no other recourse than to attempt to kill the bill in conference; if that fails, to fight the conference report in the House and Senate, and if that fails to ask the President to

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veto the bill."

In a special appearance at the AFN Board meeting on Friday, Governor William A. Egan reaffirmed that he, as representative of the State, was committed to support the House of Representatives bill land provisions through a prior promise made to Senate Interior Subcommittee Chairman John Haley.

According to the provisions of the House bill the natives would make a first selection of 16 million acres followed by the state completing its selection before the natives could choose their remaining 24 to 26 million acres.

Under the Senate version, the natives could select 30 million acres contiguous to villages and another 10 million acres before the state could withdraw any more land.

The AFN is asking for Governor Egan's support for their selection priority. AFN leaders expect the House-Senate conference committee to complete its work after the Thanksgiving recess.

In the past week the Governor and Attorney General John Havelock have repeatedly said the state will oppose any 'free floating' native selections. Also, the Governor has continued to insist he is committed to support the House version.

"I support you on all other issues," the Governor told the AFN board on Friday after he arrived at the meeting to a standing ovation from almost 50 AFN board members, lawyers, consultants and native observers crowded into the tiny BIA conference room in the Kaloa Building.

According to AFN President Don Wright, the natives should not panic if the conference re-

port does not come out before Congress adjourns for its six week recess in December. With an election next year, Congressmen and Senators will be under an increased pressure in the Spring and the natives cannot lose by waiting a few months or a year longer.

According to the 5 page memo Don Wright wrote to Gov. Egan, one of the natives' chief concerns is that the state would select land sought by natives during any delayed selection and that the acreage would be overrun by "carpet-baggers"—newcomers seeking to develop mining and other resources.

"Native villages will fight and resist state selections which infringe on their land claims areas with every means at their disposal. In effect, the title to virtually all of the state of Alaska would remain clouded for an additional 12 years," Wright said.

"In addition," the memo said, "They (the natives) will place tremendous pressure on the Secretary of Interior and the land use planning commission to withdraw and 'reserve' large blocks of land to protect their delayed selection rights. This will in effect constitute a 'de facto' continuation of the land freeze.

"A false sense of urgency" might force the state to select unwisely and deprive the natives of the opportunity to select economically viable land.

After Egan's meeting with AFN directors Friday, Wright said he believes the Governor may reevaluate his position. At the meeting, board members pressed the Governor to find out how firm his commitment to the House provisions would be.