

## Editorial Comment—

The Indians, Eskimos and Aleuts of Alaska dramatically united to become as one people for the purpose of seeking justice from the United States government just seven short years ago. That inspired act of brotherhood produced landmark legislation - the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. By that act, enacted into law on December 18, 1971, history was made and the state of Alaska forever changed.

The Natives, as one of the classes of beneficiaries under the Act, will retain title to 40 million acres of land and will be compensated in exchange for the extinguishment of their claims of aboriginal title to the remaining acreage of this vast state. They are being 'given' nothing. The state of Alaska is a beneficiary of the Act in that land selection rights under the Statehood Act may now be exercised. Settlement of the Native land rights issue also removed another impediment to the construction of the much needed Alaska pipeline.

The citizens of this nation are beneficiaries because all people have a stake in seeing that justice is done. The citizens of this nation have a stake in the additions proposed by the Department of Interior to the four primary systems - even if the rationale and procedure for doing so leave us with grave reservations.

The Claims Settlement Act makes clear that the regional and village corporations shall administer the land, the land resources and the financial assets on behalf of their respective stockholders.

The pace-setting Alaska Native Regional Corporations have both an obligation and a rare opportunity, for unlike the many corporations in the business world that today seek some semblance of a conscience, the Regional Corporations were conceived with a corporate conscience and a people-oriented mission. They must adopt the best procedures that prevail in the business community without becoming carbon copies of these occasionally impersonal and sometimes gigantic institutions. This business entity - the corporation - is a tool that must be constantly reexamined and reshaped in terms of its ability to achieve the goals that are established for it. The Natives must not allow the fact of individual corporate existence to diminish the fact that our unity and concern for one another is our strength. All of our Regional and village corporations are affected by the various Securities Acts and the I.R.S. regulations and ruling. Section 7(i) of the Settlement Act provides for the sharing of the mineral estate underlying the Native selected 40 million acres among all Native stockholders. In these critical areas the actions of one corporation impact another. We must learn to distinguish carefully between those matters which are of sole concern to the individual corporation and those which should be approached on a united basis.

One of our major concerns will continue to be the monitoring of the state and federal agencies charged with various responsibilities under the Settlement Act. The Forest Service within the Department of Agriculture, for example, seems to view the Settlement Act as a threat to their land holdings which must be resisted. Although section 2(b) of the Act provides for maximum participation by the Natives in decisions that affect them, the For-

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est Service and other agencies have been slow to respond. We will not and must not allow the 'old' way of deciding matters affecting us to continue!

Section 2(c) of the Settlement Act provides for the study of federal programs designed primarily for the benefit of Alaska Natives. The study will result in recommendations to be submitted to the congress. The danger exists that section 2(c) could take away a part of what is granted by the Act itself by reducing vital federal programs.

The task before the Natives is a complex and challenging one. All citizens have a stake in our success which, after all, is a better Alaska for all Alaskans.

A necessary condition to the successful attainment of our goals as a people is a recommitment to a unified Native effort on a statewide basis. Sealaska Corporation is committed to that concept.

— John Borbridge, Jr.  
President, Sealaska Corp.