

# ***A sentimental journey***

## ***Stewart Udall worked for claims***

By MARGIE BAUMAN

ANCHORAGE—Former Interior Secretary Stewart Udall said Saturday that Alaska Native claims legislation was by any measure an astonishing thing, but where it would all lead will be the big issue of the future.

"What will they say 30 years from now?" Udall asked the convention of the Alaska Federation of Natives. "...that

we gave them too much and this destroyed their identity and their character and their tie to the land?

"Or will they say that you not only got a generous settlement from the national government, but that you used that as a base to build a better society for yourselves; that strengthened your own culture and your own values.

"That is my hope...I see the Alaska Natives as the real guardians of the great land," he said.

Udall was cheered by a standing-room-only crowd as he stepped down from the podium at the Captain Cook hotel in Anchorage, scene of the 10th annual convention of the AFN.

It had, Udall noted, been a sentimental journey to Alaska, one in which he personally retraced from his vantage point as Interior Secretary, how the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act came to be. He is now an attorney for Hawaiian Natives seeking a similar aboriginal settlement.

# Former secretary works for claims

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notice that "if there was anything I can do by signing a piece of paper, to protect Indian land rights or water rights or anything else, bring it in.

"And that was the way the stage was set for the initial freeze," he said.

The freeze, of course, was the land freeze...on a large chunk of federal lands in Alaska, until such time as the issue of aboriginal claims was settled.

It happened in 1966 and it set off a chain of events which resulted in the settlement.

Udall remembered much of the detail, particularly that he did not talk to the members of the Alaska congressional delegation about the land freeze order before it was signed. "I think all of them thought I was crazy," he said.

A number of Alaska businessmen were also angered. "My

name was mud and I was being plastered with more mud every day. There was nothing anybody could find to say favorable to what I had done, except for the Native leaders, who were quietly learning how to speak up and how to handle the politics of it," he said.

The common argument of those opposed to the settlement at the time was "why did the Alaska Natives need land?" he

said. "Why did they have to have title to it?

"They didn't understand the importance of the land to Native people; that completely escaped them," he said.

In fact, when Richard Nixon became president and appointed Alaska Gov. Walter J. Hickel Interior Secretary, one of the first things Hickel said was that the land freeze instituted by one Interior Secretary could be undone by another.

"There was a series of breaks and one of the breaks was that Wally Hickel held a press conference in Seattle, on his way home from Washington," Udall

The AFN audience began laughing in recollection.

"He was, as you are when you've just been appointed to a President's cabinet, cocky. I was the same way. He made the statement that what one secretary could do, another one could undo...and he was right. Fortunately, he said it, because that became the focus of whether he should be confirmed or not."

After that, the pipeline issue began heating up and the Nixon White House was getting pressure from all sides, for a variety of reasons, to get the Native claims settled.

"Nixon was an adroit politician. He saw that, if there was some way out of this, that would please his friends in the oil industry and would please Alaska and would please the Natives, let's get it solved and it would be a big plus." Udall said. So Nixon signed the claims legislation that came through Congress and the AFN, then in convention in Anchorage, was told via telephone.

Udall said that at this point he was most concerned about the future; about what would happen over the next few decades.

He warned that there really is an energy crisis, in his view, and at the rate oil is being consumed in the United States, the country was going to run out.

"There are a lot of people down in Washington who say 'let's ransack Alaska, let's find it (the oil) and bring it out now.' I don't think that's in the interest of Alaska or the country as a whole.

"Whatever oil resources you have will come out, but why the rush," Udall said.

"Let's stretch it out, let's conserve it, let's make it last."

The former Interior Secretary said oil and other resources must be developed with an eye to conservation and that, in this vein, what's good for the country would also be good for the region (of Alaska).