

Last Minutes Entreaties--

Interior Department Fails to Extend Enrollment Deadline

In spite of last minute entreaties, the Department of the Interior failed to extend the enrollment deadline beyond March 30, stating that other time frames within the Act make it imperative that the roll be closed on that date.

Lights burned late in the Anchorage offices of the official Enrollment Office as workers continued to receive applications right up to the midnight deadline.

John Hope, Enrollment Coordinator, said the last application was submitted about 10 PM March 30, although the office re-

mained open until about 12:30.

George Walters, Assistant Coordinator, arrived back from a flying tour to Washington, Oregon, and California, where he acted as a courier to pick up late applications that would not have reached Anchorage in time by mail.

Another batch of last minute applications were delivered by Nellie Courtenay who flew in from Inuvik to deliver forms submitted by Alaska natives living in Canada.

"The day after was a day of rest around here," said Hope.

The staff were sorry to hear

of the resignation of Frances Degnan, who had worked intensively on the enrollment project since its beginning. Frances reportedly plans to return to her home in Unalakleet.

Hope could give no exact figures for the amount of applications submitted on the last day.

"In any enrollment," he said "the last day is traditionally the heaviest. We were no exception."

Late applications have continued to come in and are processed exactly as any other, said Hope.

"If an application doesn't meet one of the requirements it

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Enrollment . . .

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is rejected. A late application would fail to meet the requirement of time and would be rejected on that basis, probably marked: "Not timely filed."

A last-stand legal fight ensued at the regulations hearings just one day prior to the closure of the roll. Attorneys for the twelve native regional corporations claimed that many people had refrained from enrolling to certain villages until they were assured that those villages would be qualified under the Land Claims Act.

The confusion apparently stemmed from the fact that the Department itself had two definitions for the term "residence". For purposes of enrollment, it was only necessary to claim that your permanent residence was "the place of domicile on April 1, 1970, which is the location of the permanent place of abode intended by the applicant to be his actual home.

It is the center of the Native life of the applicant to which he has the intent to return when absent from that place.

A region or village may be the permanent residence of an applicant on April 1, 1970, even though he was not actually living there on that date, if he has continued to intend that place to be his home."

So goes one definition of "residence". Now presumably if 25 or more people enroll to a specific place, village, or site, it should qualify as a village and be entitled to land under the Claims Act.

But the criteria for village and the definition of "residence" changes and it is not clear if each and every place to which 25 or more people have referred as their permanent place of residence as of April 1, 1970, will in fact receive an entitlement of land.

A specific case in point is the village of Afognak in the Koniag region. 25 people have enrolled to Afognak and consider that they will ultimately move back to the now-abandoned village.

However, two days before the end of the enrollment period, the people who had en-

rolled to Afognak did not know if it would be classified a village under the terms of the Act.

By not knowing, they stand to lose their right to acquire land as a village corporation.

One spokesman for the native groups requested that the Department go back to the concept of "residency" as outlined in the enrollment section of the Act and "remove the cloud that hangs over this whole group."

"People belong in certain villages, they want to enroll there, but they're afraid if they enroll to a village, it may not be qualified."

According to a representative from Koniag, one-half of their people enrolled to Kodiak through a "fluke in enrollment".

"Most of those people are from the villages and should enroll back to those villages. Now there are going to be one-half to share in 40 townships."

"All of this indecision is really affecting the people themselves. They're afraid. They don't know what to do."

Legal counsel for the Department of the Interior admitted that there were many divergent opinions within the Department as to the enrollment.

Attorney Weinberg, speaking for the Native groups said, "If the Department changed its concept of residency from enrollment, then it is going to have to start the enrollment process all over again."

"The time to register expires in a couple of days. But we are told here today that the concept of residence has changed. Either the Department must come through with a definition or it must extend. It cannot have it two ways. It cannot leave the peoples' rights dangling!"

There were, indeed, many who waited to the last hour to make their decision, and there were undoubtedly also, many who failed to make that decision prior to the deadline, midnight, March 30, 1973.

The first period of the Implementation of the Alaska Native Land Claims Settlement Act is ended. The Roll is closed.