

Rise and Fall of Alaska Plan--

U.S. Department of Labor Fails to Fund Hiring Plan

Beginning a series

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PART I: THE PROMISE AND THE PROBLEM

What is the Alaska Plan? How did it come to be, what did it hope to accomplish, and where does it stand today? This three-part series on the Alaska Plan will attempt to answer some of these questions and to raise a few more.

There are few things today on which the shadow of the on-again-off again, "Now you see it, now you don't" trans-Alaska pipeline does not fall. The Alaska Plan is no exception.

The Alaska Plan has to do with jobs and employment. It

has to do with construction and unions and minorities. The trans-Alaska oil and gas pipeline also has to do with jobs, employment, construction, and unions.

Since the discovery of oil at Prudhoe Bay, the pipeline has held a promise of prosperity and jobs. And although it was not directly behind the development of the Alaska Plan, the pipeline was most certainly in the minds of everyone who helped put it together.

An incident connected with pipe stored at Valdez by the Alyeska Pipeline Service Company touched off a major controversy between minority groups and the unions, and the meeting set in Juneau to resolve

the conflict was the first of many steps that eventually led to the adoption of the Alaska Plan.

In January 1971, Alyeska Pipeline Service Company (ALPS) let contracts for the removal of bevel guards on pipe stored at Valdez. One contract was awarded to a native-owned company, North Gulf Natives, Inc., and a second contract was let to a non-native, union company.

According to a spokesman for ALPS, Inc., "There was a union picket line against the native company 3 or 4 days after the job started. The natives, however were bound and determined to do the work.

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Fall of Alaska Plan...

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We opened a gate for them and posted guards."

"The unions didn't want the job given to native people who were non-union. On the other hand, the natives were unhappy because they had been trying to get in unions for years and the unions wouldn't have them. Now suddenly, the unions were ready to admit them."

This situation was not unique to the state. All across the nation, minority groups were taking action to gain admittance to the unions, and the federal government was formulating equal opportunity programs for projects on which federal monies were being used.

States were given the option of accepting the federal plan or formulating "hometown" plans.

In February of 1971, a Minority Coalition was formed including representatives from AFN, the NAACP, the Fillipino Club, the ANB, the Spanish Speaking Community, AIM, PRIDE, and many other organizations.

The Alaska Plan Committee began meeting weekly, minorities sitting down with unions and contractors. Many months later, these meetings resulted in a 33 page document called "The Alaska Plan".

Its stated goal was to "increase minority group employment in all phases of the construction industry in the Alaska area." More specifically, it set an objective of reaching, within each union, "a membership of minorities proportionate to the minority population in Alaska."

The goals were to be reached over a five year period, and as a result of cooperative efforts by all interested parties — labor, management, and the minority community.

Many of the unions already had strong, ongoing apprenticeship-training programs. A new program called Outreach came into being as a joint effort between labor and management. That same spring the State Department of Labor conducted an ALASKAN MANPOWER RESOURCES study in small communities, publishing a booklet for nearly every village in Alaska, listing available skills in in each area.

The Tundra Times hailed the Alaska Plan, calling it "an action plan", and in May of 1972, the U.S. Secretary of Labor, James Hodgson, signed the Plan into being. All that was needed was the appointment of an executive director for the Plan, staff, offices, and funding to get it off the ground.

The Promise looked very bright. But by November of that year, the promise had begun to fade.

Senator Mike Gravel requested the Secretary of Labor to release funds for the Alaska Plan.

"The Nixon administration has held up funds for equal employment programs throughout the nation. Until these are released," said Gravel, "the Alaska Plan and similar plans in other states are at a virtual standstill."

"The Plan is worthless rhetoric unless the funds are there to support it," declared Gravel.

In December, Governor Egan signed an Executive order requiring that all State of Alaska construction projects utilize the goals and timetables established in the Alaska Plan. Hopes

went up again for the bright future.

Bob Willard, who had chaired the original Alaska Plan Committee, had continued to act as volunteer chairman until such time as a paid executive director could be hired.

Willard functioned with the help of an all-volunteer, unpaid committee. In January of 1973, a proposal was submitted for \$125,000 for implementing the Alaska Plan goals. No money was forthcoming.

Willard reported nothing but negative responses from the administration and from the Alaska Congressional delegation. But in spite of lack of funds, the unions were increasing the membership of native Alaskans and minorities.

In one year's time, the State government doubled its figures on native hire and more than tripled the number of blacks working for the state. People with other full-time jobs, worked to make the Alaska Plan a reality, money or no.

But disturbing rumors began to surface that the Alaska Plan had been compromised. Pat Mayo, permanent federal advisor on the Alaska Plan Committee and also head of the federal office of Equal Opportunity for the Alaska Region commented:

"I think what is meant by a compromise is that the Alaska Plan is non-functioning for lack of funding."

"The nearest move," she added, "is to seek other types of funding." If support is not forthcoming in the very near future, said Mayo "the Plan would be in serious jeopardy."

Bud Wadsworth, State Supervisor, Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training, U.S. Dept. of Labor, described the situation:

"Here's labor and management sitting down under the auspices of the federal government in good faith."

"They sign the implementing regulation that comes along (the Alaska Plan), but they are never given the assistance agreed upon. The government has refused to fund it."

Page One of the Alaska Plan document states: "All parties to this agreement shall make every good faith effort to achieve the objectives outlined herein."

The history of the Alaska Plan shows much evidence of "good faith effort" on the part of many of the people who entered into the agreement as a result of that early confrontation in Valdez. Much has been done on a voluntary basis to bring the minority groups into the mainstream of Alaska construction.

Yet all the "good faith in the world" will not accomplish the objectives set forth in the Plan. America runs on dollars. The Alaska Plan must be funded or it will remain 33 pieces of paper with a fancy name.

NEXT WEEK: Part II — The Programs: Unions and management cooperate in job training and apprenticeship programs. A look at the state's skill centers. Alyeska's plan for native involvement in pipeline construction, and what the federal agencies are doing to help implement the Plan.

Part III — The Prognosis: Is the Alaska Plan working? Can the goals be achieved with no funding, no executive director, no staff, and no offices? Another look at the Promise.