

**Editorial—**

# **Time for Thoughts and Deeds**

The native land claims bill was introduced in Congress a week ago today marking the hour that finally struck after the interminable time of 83 years. That is a long period of time ever since the Act of May 17, 1884 when Congress made a declaration that the Alaska natives "shall not be disturbed in the possession of any lands actually in their use and occupation or now claimed by them, but the terms under which such persons may acquire title to such lands is reserved for future

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*"I may not agree with a word you say but I will defend unto death your right to say it." - Voltaire*

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legislation by Congress."

The lethargy of the past Congresses has finally been shaken loose. The process of breaking this lethargy came rather suddenly, as time goes in matters such as the lands question in Alaska, and this suddenness is rather disconcerting. It is bringing with it some feelings akin to impending dangers because the mechanics of the final thrust for solutions came within the last few short years. The fast and urgent process in arriving to the point of introduction of the bill leaves a feeling that it was done too fast and that not enough time was given to weigh matters connected with it. This is past history now and the stark reality of the introduction of the measure is upon us and the native people and their leaders must face it with the best minds they can muster.

"This is a draft which so far merely represents a bill which the administration is prepared to support," declared Senator Ernest Gruening in his wire to the Alaska press media a few days ago.

This means that our native people and their leaders, the State, and all others concerned, will be given the opportunity to study the draft and the parties concerned will be given the chance to submit proposals for changes or amendments. Since there has been sharp dissatisfaction among the native leaders as to some of the contents of the bill before it was introduced, they should now make a very serious study of the draft and be prepared to voice unequivocally their convictions and disagreements with the measure as it now stands.

The land claims bill, even at this stage before serious discussions are being made on it, is already touching our ways of life throughout Alaska and it cannot but influence us profoundly. There will be no time to tarry for our native leaders and their people in preparing their arguments and these must be truly representative. The urgency of the need to get right down to work cannot be stressed too much, especially when we know sudden requests for testimonies can be made a few days ahead of time leaving little opportunity for proper preparations on things we truly wished to say.

This is the time, NOW, for concentrated, responsible thoughts and actions. The bill in its present form must not be allowed to pass. An alternative bill, such as the one submitted to the Department of the Interior by the Alaska Federation of Native Associations in Anchorage, may be needed.

Native leaders from organizations and villages should hold regional meetings as soon as they possibly can to prepare for discussions and hearings.

These are but a few actions that must occur—and act we must because whatever is done now and in the time ahead will greatly influence the future of our people.