

Native land claims amendments pass

A bill correcting technical errors in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, and two amendments, all sponsored by Senator Ted Stevens, passed the Senate November 1. The bill has already passed the House, which must act on the amendments.

The first amendment would allow the Sealaska Regional Corporation to make land selections in the withdrawal for the Klukwan Village Corporation. "The Settlement Act provided that Regional Corporations could make such selections within the withdrawals for any of the villages in their regions, following the completion of the village selections, and this amendment corrects a technical error which has prevented Sealaska from making selections in the Klukwan withdrawal," the Senator said.

Another measure introduced by Stevens concerns another

selection problem of the Settlement Act: the Cook Inlet Land Exchange. The exchange has been challenged in the state courts of Alaska, and with the other processes that have become involved in the situation, 18 months have elapsed in which the land swap has been held in limbo. Stevens said his amendment "will extend certain deadlines involving the implementation of the Cook Inlet Land Exchange 18 months, the amount of time which this land exchange has been delayed. The amendment also provides that certain lands already patented to the State, which are involved in the exchange, shall be transferred to the Cook Inlet Region with a patent subject to the reservation of any valid easements at a later date."

A third amendment, sponsored by Senator Mike Gravel, would allow the Secretary of In-

terior to recognize assignments made by regional corporations of money due to them from the Alaska Native Fund.

The Native Claims Settlement Act awarded \$962,500,000 to Alaska's Natives. So far, some \$325 million has been paid. If corporations were allowed to "assign" the rest of the amount due to them to financial institutions, they could receive low-interest loans. However, a decision by the U.S. Comptroller General forbade assignment of Alaska Native Fund moneys.

Gravel told Senators in introducing the measure that several corporations would be able to get relief from constrained financial conditions if they could borrow money at the low interest rates. Gravel's amendment overturns the Comptroller General's ruling and allows the assignment of funds with subsequent lower interest rates.