

Wright Asks Agnew to Intervene

WASHINGTON, D.C. — (Mar. 7) Alaska Federation of Natives President Don Wright, in a letter released to the Tundra Times today, called upon Vice President Spiro Agnew to intervene in the administration position proposed by Interior Secretary Rogers Morton for settlement of the Alaska Native land claims.

AFN President Wright stated in the letter, "The Native people of this country fear that your administration is about to commit the greatest betrayal of Native people in the history of

this nation. I refer to the likely proposal by the administration for settlement of the 184 year old Alaska Natives land claims."

Wright explained that the AFN sought a settlement of 60 million acres, \$500 million and a two per cent mineral royalty. In this proposal, introduced as Senate Bill 835, "we are willing to give part of our land to the United States in return for just compensation," said Wright.

The new administration proposal, as outlined by Secretary

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Morton, would cut back land title to between 80,000 and 500,000 acres and pay \$500 million for extinguishment of remaining title, he continued.

"Not only is the administration cutting back on an already unjust position, it is doing so against the clear wishes of the Native people," Wright said.

The AFN president noted that, as guardian and trustee for the natives, the Interior Secretary is legally bound to act on behalf of natives.

"Yet today he stands ready to propose a bill confirming title in less than one-twelfth the land we have decided we must retain. Our guardian is stealing 55,000,000 acres of our land," added Wright.

Should the administration support the "confiscatory" proposal advocated by Secretary Morton, he remarked, it will have failed in its new policy of dealing fairly with native people and the nation will have failed a test of justice.

Wright explained that the AFN had requested a fair hearing for "full and open consultation with our people."

"We urge that you see that he grants us the fair hearing requested...We urge you to see that our President isn't betrayed by men who do not believe in

his policy of justice for the Native people.

"We are outraged over Secretary Morton's recent statements. Unless there is visible proof that this Administration means what it says about dealing fairly with natives, I fear that our people might not continue to pursue the peaceful path of negotiation," Wright stated.

He added that Alaska Natives were "near the breaking point."

Concluded Wright, "Your intervention and assistance could be the single most important step in maintaining peace and insuring that this President and his Administration go down in history as having dealt honestly with Native people and given them true justice."

The AFN position on the administration proposal received support from John Rainer, Chief Indian Member of the National Council on Indian Opportunity, a Presidential council which is chaired by Mr. Agnew.

Presenting the AFN position to the Vice President, Rainer offered remarks in support of the Alaska Natives.

"I write you as Chief Indian Member of the National Council on Indian Opportunity asking that you take a personal interest in the serious problems facing the Alaska Natives with regard to their land claims bill," Rainer stated.

"The Indian members of the Council feel just as strongly as the Alaska Natives that under the policies cited by the President in his July 8, 1970 message that equitable treatment of this critical issue bears directly upon meaningful Indian self-determination," he added.

"We the Indian members of this Council want to reiterate and reinforce and recommendation on this matter which was given to you by the former Indian members of this Council in the meeting you held at the White House in January 1970. We strongly support the Alaska Federation of Natives' proposal now before the Congress," Rainer said.

Announcement has been made that the Alaska Native land claims settlement will be of significant concern to the delegates attending the Conference on Indian Self-Determination of the National Congress of American Indians which is convened this week in Kansas City. Mr. Agnew is scheduled to speak at that meeting.

AFN President Wright indicated that he hopes to rally strong support for Alaska Natives in order to further influence the Vice President and set the stage for an expanded lobbying effort for the AFN bill.