

KENNEDY PARTY PROBES INTO PROBLEMS

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Senator Ted Kennedy and other members of the Subcommittee on Indian Education were on a four-day tour of Alaskan villages to ascertain for themselves what was needed to bring the impoverished and neglected residents of rural Alaska into the modern age.

Although their mission was centered upon improving educational standards, other related fields of poverty and housing, as well as the problems of health, were explored.

In Bethel, the party surveyed a hospital marked with holes in the ceiling and mold in the operating room. Here also, Kennedy toured a cabin which measured 10 by 14 feet and sheltered a family of eleven.

Then the group saw some of the new frame homes produced by the housing program at the rate of one per day.

At one point in Bethel, Kennedy noted that some of the families were obtaining water from the polluted river. He learned that the only sources of clean water were wells controlled by government installations, as no one could privately finance a well.

The problem of obtaining clean, healthy water was not exclusive to Bethel. It was prevalent at every stop on the tour.

It was at Bethel that the Senator met Margaret Nick, a Legal Services aide. "Students from the lower forty-eight don't come to Alaska to go to school," she stated. So why should Alaskan students "go outside to get a high school education?" she asked.

Kennedy was so impressed with her that he asked Margaret to repeat her statements at the subcommittee hearings held in Fairbanks.

On the second day of the trip, the Air Force C-130 bearing the Kennedy contingent landed at Galena. The weather was warm, a balmy 48 degrees, and the party stood outside in the sun to talk with the BIA principal about the problems of the school.

Following this conversation, the school advisory board told Kennedy and Senator Walter Mondale, D-Minnesota, of their desire to educate native students closer to home.

As the party was preparing to depart Galena, one elderly native pleaded with Kennedy, asking him to visit his village of Nulato. "Come visit my village," he requested. "It is not far."

The Senator was informed that Nome weather had lifted enough so that the plane could land and that this opportunity might not last. He decided to fly into Nome.

Most of the frame houses in Nome's King Island Village closely resembled Bethel's Louse Town. Many of the homes were without electricity while the residents burned driftwood when it was available, oil when they could afford it.

Repeatedly, Kennedy would ask, "How can you afford to feed your family?"

Often the answer was obvious. Looking toward his meager stores, one man replied, "Sometimes, we must do without."

In Nome's Public High School, teachers posted young sentries in the hallways to notify their classmates of Senator Kennedy's approach so that they might greet him. Curious Eskimos lined the second-story windows of the facility in order to catch a glimpse of the Senator.

The fog was thickening and glowed bright, catching and reflecting the midday sun as the party boarded the plane at the Nome airfield. By the time it landed at Arctic Village, the



APPALLED—Senators Edward Kennedy, right, and Ted Stevens, left, and Congressman Howard Pollock, center, are seen at a meeting with the Kotzebue School Advisory Board after having

inspected the library of the Kotzebue school. Kennedy stated that he was "appalled" at the lack of any books about the culture and history of Alaskan natives.

land was dimly lit in evening twilight.

As the aircraft touched down on the rough airstrip, it gave one violent jerk before resting at a full stop. At this, the Massachusetts Senator uttered a brief cry, possibly recalling a near-fatal plane crash several years distant.

As senators, staff, and press filed out of the aircraft, a dozen dog teams and snowmobiles arrived. The party was hustled aboard the unique transports and raced the half-mile to the village over the narrow, twisting trail.

When the caravan approached the schoolhouse, it was greeted by a cardboard poster tacked to the side of the building. The crayon-lettered sign read, "Welcome to Arctic V."

Almost typical of the entire journey were the elderly Indians who displayed smiles and extended their hands for a vigorous handshake. Many of the young children, too young even to be familiar with the Kennedy name, were more curious than enthralled.

The schedule called for only a brief visit to Arctic Village. When the entourage returned to the airstrip, it was discovered that a starter for the number two engine was inoperable and needed repair.

This afforded an opportunity to spend several more hours in the scenic village, nestled among the mountains of the Brooks Range.

These additional hours were consumed in casual conversation with the residents of the town. Here, Senator Kennedy was presented with a game by the children.

Thanking them, he said, "I will play it with my children." Word came that the starter had repaired and the group was off again.

It was late evening as the skillful crew set down the C-130 at Barrow. Buses and trucks were waiting to whisk the party to the Arctic Research Laboratory for a steak dinner and a restful night's sleep. The group was awoken at 6:30 the following morning to face another full day.

The subcommittee members met with the people of Barrow in an open town meeting. They heard testimony from several of the townspeople.

Tom Brower told of the feeling of separation which results from sending native students away for an education. He stated

that this separation is similar to that experienced by the Inuvik people of Canada.

"Their children were not even allowed to come home to their parents in the same town," he said. "They had to be boarded in the dormitories and that was hurting those parents. It's probably the same type of feeling that some of our children get when they are not permitted to mingle with their own people."

One girl claimed that the attitude of her teachers was detrimental to her education. "The attitude I received from these teachers was that it doesn't really matter," she stated. "They say 'you will get your high school diploma and the government will always be there to help you along.' Their expectations weren't high enough of us in order for us to achieve anything."

During the meeting, the Senators were receptive to the idea of locally controlled schools. One suggestion which appeared to be highly favored by subcommittee members was increased training and hiring of Eskimo teachers and teacher aides.

The meeting was concluded after Kennedy was presented with a carved walrus tusk by the Barrow Eskimos. Accepting the gift, he said, "If you come to Washington, you will see it proudly displayed in my office."

The next stop on the tour was Kotzebue. The group was then to be taken to Noatak, Kivalina, and Selawik by bush planes. Due to weather, this portion of the trip was postponed and the group inspected the Kotzebue school, meeting with the school advisory board in the school's library.

Kennedy, as he examined the library, said he was "appalled" at the lack of any books for the Eskimo children to read about the history and culture of their people.

The school advisory board told Kennedy that it was an ineffectual body, since none of its suggestions have been implemented by the BIA. Mondale asked what the ideal educational situation would be.

School board members responded that regional high schools would enable students to learn about the "outside world" while remaining close to their homes.

Kennedy indicated that he would favor regional high schools. He stated, "This is the kind of a

program that could make a great deal of sense."

As the party left Kotzebue, ground fog crept in and the wind began to pick up. Weather had threatened to isolate the group during the entire trip and had greatly disrupted the precise schedule prepared by subcommittee staff.

At Fort Yukon though, the weather could not have been better. One mother could be seen pulling her young infant on a small sled trying to catch sight of Senator Kennedy.

Curious Athabascan children squinted their eyes as they quietly viewed the scene. The team of dignitaries proceeded to the school where the same questions were asked and the same answers given.

The entire tour possessed a quality of sameness, not because it was intended to be so, but because the same problems existed everywhere. The problems of poverty, housing, malnutrition and disease were seen at every stop.

Fairbanks was different. There were to be no inspections inside one-room cabins. Here the subcommittee was to hold its final Alaskan hearing. The Senators were to reach a focal point of the tour and try to make some sense from their findings.

"What is needed are less Indian experts, and more expert Indians," the subcommittee was told by native students from the University of Alaska.

The students requested integration of "de facto" segregated BIA schools, higher standards of education, increased financial aids, de-emphasis of vocational programs, and improved guidance-counselor programs.

Further testimony was heard at the hearings, conducted April 11 at Alaskaland, from Robert Willard, representing the Alaska Native Brotherhood. He stated "Ostensibly... you have heard testimony in support of the regional high schools concept. I can only concur."

Dr. Kraus, Professor of Linguistics at the University of Alaska, said no longer can policy be designed "to remove and alienate the children from their culture."

Perhaps the most striking testimony was offered by Margaret Nick, brought from Bethel by Senator Kennedy in order that the "whole nation can hear what she has to say," as Kennedy put it.

She urged immediate action to solve the problems confronting her people, saying, "Let's take and open the hot potato before it gets cold."

Senators Mondale and Kennedy described testimony given by Peter John and Richard Frank, of Minto, as "excellent." Dr. Martha Wilson, Dr. John Fleshman, and Dr. Barbara Nachmann of the Alaska Native Health Service gave testimony on the health problems experienced by rural Alaskans.

During the course of the evening, Senator Stevens indicated that he would like to make a statement. Stevens and Pollock were urged by Republican leaders to condemn the trip as a political sideshow, as did Senators Bellmon, Murphy, and Saxbe who left the tour after the first day.

"My position and Congressman Pollock's position is that this trip is good for Alaska," he said. "I think we've seen a great deal that has brought about the education of some national news figures who will now know something about Alaska... The real purpose of the trip... is fulfilled," he continued. "... I hope that all Alaskans feel the same as I do... I was late because the gentleman I consider to be the most conservative member of the Alaska State Senate called me to tell me to 'stay with you and give them hell.'"

Senator Kennedy and his party left Alaska after admitting awareness of the problems of Alaskan natives and pledging innovations in federal programs affecting them.

☆☆☆☆☆ UNCONQUERED

Sen. Ted Kennedy was presented with several gifts from the native people of Alaska on his tour. Perhaps the most impressive was an ornately carved walrus tusk given to him by the people of Barrow.

As he accepted it, Kennedy said, "I can understand now why the lower forty-eight never conquered Barrow."

NEEDING MOST—

Kerttula's Resolution Asks Native Scholarships

House Speaker Jalmor Kerttula introduced a resolution Monday requesting the University of Alaska establish a comprehensive program to assist native students in pursuing a college education.

Commenting on the proposed legislation Kerttula said, "I was surprised and dismayed to discover that the University has not developed a program to help native students overcome many of the problems of college life."

"Native students are generally unfamiliar with the academic community," Kerttula said, "consequently they are faced with a great many more problems than the average student. Native students are required to spend as much time understanding how a University functions as they spend understanding subject matter. This, of course, creates a tremendous impediment to academic achievement."

Kerttula added, "I am confident the University of Alaska can develop a comprehensive program to assist native students pursuing a college education. Such a program in conjunction with existing scholarships should go a long way towards increasing the educational opportunities of Alaskan natives."