

What about them?

All states have problems, but Alaska's must certainly be unique. Running a state more than twice as large as Texas with a population roughly equivalent to the city of Wichita, Kansas has never been easy.

Alaska's Senator Mike Gravel has written "Americans in affluent areas of the United States have no idea of the dimensions of rural poverty and living hardships that Alaskans must pay to live in the land they love."

Now there's oil. For those who live in Alaska, the oil can mean a better way of life, new opportunity, a real choice for the future. Initially, the development of the North Slope oilfields and the construction of the trans Alaska pipeline will mean a boom in jobs and business activity. But this will be temporary. (For example: several thousand people will be needed to build the pipeline, but fewer than three hundred employees will be required for actual operation.) The long-term benefit to Alaska and its people will come from a sustained annual income from production and transportation of a valuable resource.

Already the State has realized more than \$900 million from the sale of North Slope oil leases. When the oil actually begins to move to market, Alaska will receive a 12½% royalty on oil produced from State lands plus additional income from taxes. Official State estimates place these combined

revenues, when the pipeline is operating at full capacity, in excess of \$150 million annually—more than the State's entire operating budget for 1967-68.

Translated into schools, hospitals, roads and other vital public programs, this income can herald a long-awaited era of security and opportunity for many Alaskans who have not fully enjoyed these benefits in the past.

The Native Situation—some have voiced concern that this sudden change might "ruin" the Alaskan Natives. The truth is that, to date, the Native Alaskan has been the recipient of nearly all of civilization's curses and precious few of its benefits. With the coming of the "white man," the cultures of the Eskimos, Indians and Aleuts were touched, changed and altered for all time. Today there are some 53,000 Native Alaskans in Alaska and most of them live in poverty. The effects are tragic. Their life expectancy is about half the national average. Their rate of death from accidents and disease is twice as high as it is for other Americans. Typically, of the approximately 10,000 Eskimos who live in Western Alaska, only 45 have college degrees and one-fourth have no formal schooling at all.

These Americans ask only that they be allowed to improve their own situation.

In 1884, the United States recognized that Native Alaskans should be undisturbed in their actual use and occupancy of lands claimed by them. Even today, the Native Claims question remains unresolved and awaits resolution by the Congress of the United States. A prompt and fair land claim settlement really means that the Native Alaskan should at last have the opportunity to look at our way of life and make up his own mind whether to take it or leave it.

Much hinges on a prompt and reasonable settlement of the claims of the Alaskan Natives, for until this is accomplished no one—not the Natives, nor the State of Alaska, nor the United States as a whole, nor the oil industry—can proceed with the orderly development and use of Alaska's natural resources.

U.S. Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska puts it this way, "Settlement of the Alaska Native land claims and construction of the trans Alaska pipeline are essential actions to assure a brighter future for Alaska and the United States. As the nation seeks to protect our ecology, it is important to remember that people—all our people—are part of our ecology and will benefit from these actions."

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