

"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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### Editorial Comment—

## The Claims Settlement

The 104 year old Alaska native land claims issue is apparently on the way to being settled by the government of our nation. Not everyone is pleased with the measure as it came out of the conference committee. Not all the Alaska natives are happy. And great many of the general population of the state are not happy.

At any rate, significant history is being made, and it is in the process of being made. The important ingredients of this historic event is going to be the exemplary efforts of the Alaska native leaders under the co-leadership of the Alaska Federation of Natives' Presidents Emil Notti and Donald R. Wright. The initial leadership fell on the shoulders of Notti and the latter part fell on the shoulders of Wright in the dramatic five-year effort.

The input of the native leadership in the highly complex claims issue has been of great magnitude. This amazing involvement has been done with no little skill on the part of the native leaders. This spells strength of character, will and concern for their people of today and their people of tomorrow. Within a scant seven years, the leaders have come forward and quickly entered into the great and difficult problem. This also showed that they had talent to lead and to delve into the complexity of the task at hand. Along with this talent was the courageous attitudes and tenacity to stay on top of the problem. The work has been exhaustive and electric with emotion. It has been a thorough fight for justice as they saw it.

The fight for equitable settlement of the claims has been fraught with suspicions, charges that Alaska natives have no rights to lands and other similar accusations. The native leaders have had to endure these difficulties individual leaders, however, pretty much to a man, have not flattered. This is a mark of courage and dedication to a cause that would mean happier status of life among the native people of Alaska.

Another great achievement native leaders attained was the selling of their cause to the nation generally. Without this achievement, it would have been more difficult to sell the native land claims issue to the Congress of the United States. In the process, the native people of Alaska gained powerful friends among senators and congressmen, so much so that the passage of the claims bills in the House and Senate were overwhelmingly heavy on the "aye" side of the votes. Such legislative actions have carved out the situation we now have—the verge of a solution to a great problem.

If the bill is approved, or when it is approved, the President will, no doubt, sign it. That moment will be the beginning of a great era for the native people of Alaska. It will not be an easy task. It will demand all the strength the leadership has. It will be a job for the present and more for the future of our native people.

Let us recognize the task that will fall on our shoulders. It will test the strength of our leaders as well as the rest of our people. We also have proven that we can handle highly complex problems, such as the Alaska native land claims. We must not do less in the future. We must meet it with confidence and then do more for the good of our people today and those of tomorrow.

## History of Native Organizations

By GORDON HARRISON  
University of Alaska

Today there are two dozen Native organizations united in the Alaska Federation of Natives. Most of these organizations were established during the 1960s. However, the history of Native organization in Alaska begins as long ago as 1912, when the Alaska Native Brotherhood was established in southeastern Alaska.

The Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB) began as a fraternal society of Tlingit and Haida Indians. It had its origins in the social groups that were affiliated with local churches.

Gradually the Alaska Native Brotherhood became a powerful political organization with local chapters—or "camps"—in virtually every community of southeast Alaska. Many substantial political victories were won by the organization for the southeast Indians, such as the early recognition of voting rights and the desegregation of schools.

Not only did the ANB become directly involved in issues of importance to the Natives, it exercised considerable influence over a sizeable proportion of the electorate in the First Judicial District. Thus, politicians regularly sought the Indians' views on issues of importance to them.

Constitutionally the Alaska Native Brotherhood was not limited to a membership of Tlingit and Haida Indians. Indeed, at times it actively sought to become a truly state-wide organization. But the ANB was never very successful in establishing camps outside of southeast Alaska, despite its efforts.

Camps were begun at Anchorage, Fairbanks, Nome, Bristol Bay, and the Pribilof Islands, but they either died for lack of support or became independent organizations. The only camp outside of southeast Alaska that had an active life was at Copper Center.

It is not certain why the ANB never got a secure foothold outside of southeast Alaska. It

is perhaps because the organization was closely identified with the Tlingit and Haida Indians, and was thought to best suit conditions in the southeast.

It was not until the early 1960s that a Native organization movement began to emerge in Alaska outside of the southeast. The first signs of this movement appeared in 1961, when Eskimos of northwest Alaska and the arctic slope joined in an organization known as Inupiat Paitot.

This organization was supported by the American Association of Indian Affairs, which became active in Alaska Native affairs at that time.

The AAIA also provided money to start the TUNDRA TIMES, and this newspaper dates back to the founding of the Inupiat Paitot. (Howard Rock, editor, was executive secretary of the organization.)

Six months after this beginning, several village representatives gathered in Tanana and created an organization of Athabaskan Indians. This organization, known as the Dena Nena Hlensh and Tanana Chiefs Conference, drew upon the aboriginal tradition of interior Indian chiefs meeting to discuss matters of common interest.

The Tanana Chiefs Conference covers the largest land area of all the regional Native organizations, some 165,000 sq. miles.

Also in 1962 a similar organization of villages was established in southwest Alaska—the Association of Alaska Village Council Presidents (AVCP). This organization represents the largest number of individual Natives, about 15,000, and has the largest number of votes in the AFN.

Two local, predominantly urban associations followed the founding of the Tanana Chiefs Conference and the AVCP: the Fairbanks Native Association in 1963 and the Cook Inlet Native Association in 1964. (Both of these organizations were formed with the help of the late Nick Gray, who was one of the strongest Native supporters of organizational strength and unity.) In 1964 the Yukon Flats Native association came into existence.

In 1964, two regional associations were formed to replace the now defunct Inupiat Paitot: the Northwest Alaska Native Association organized approximately a dozen villages on Kotzebue Sound and the Kobuk and Noatak rivers, and the Arctic Slope Association brought together Eskimo villages of the far north.

In 1966 and 1967 other regional groups organized in the Aleutian Island, the Alaska Peninsula, Bristol Bay, Kodiak Island and the Seward Peninsula. At the present time there are 24 Native organizations, some representing dozens of villages, some representing urban Natives, and some representing only a single village.

The organizations born during the 1960's were closely connected with the emergence of the land crisis of the same period. Both the state and the federal government began to make threatening encroachments on Native land.

Early in the 1960s the federal government withdrew a large amount of land for the purpose of testing an atomic bomb underground near Cape Thompson.

Had this plan (code-named Project Chariot) been carried out the food source of many Eskimos of northwest Alaska may have been endangered by radio-

## Governor Sends Special Message to Natives

Settlement of the land claims of the Alaska Native people bestows the justice promised in the treaty of purchase, the statehood act, and the Constitution of the State of Alaska. It will open the door to full participation by all of us in the economic, political and social life of the state.

Not for transference of governmental obligations. By enhancing the opportunity of the Native people for self-development, the ability of all the people of the state to move forward is enhanced.

No one can foresee with complete certainty what the impact of the settlement will be. Certainly, it should have and will have no effect in reducing the responsibility of the state to provide services on an equal basis to all its citizens. The settlement is in payment for just claims held by the Natives.

By working toward a common goal, we in Alaska have seen justice served and we are learning to live as one people in fulfillment of the ideals on which America was founded.

And through cooperation now among all Alaskans, our children and grandchildren can inherit the kind-of state which we are all dedicated to building, a society of people who genuinely care about each other as brothers and sisters and cherished human beings.

A claims settlement will further provide resources for developing the most important one of all our human resources. It will bring about human betterment which up to now, because of the state's meager financial resources, has been impossible to achieve.

Human betterment programs which complement each other, no matter what the source, can enable us to make strides never before dreamed of in health care, in education, in housing . . . in the entire realm of human deprivation and suffering caused by poverty.

Through cooperation, we can achieve much. For example, There is a need for cooperation which will insure that all lands available to the state for selection and which have been granted for ownership by Natives under the claims settlement are used in a manner which will provide the maximum benefits in all respect to the people.

There are many areas of consideration ahead of us in which such cooperation is only logical.

An important consideration is resources conservation and development. Cooperation in this is vital if both the state and Natives are to realize maximum benefits from lands, petroleum reserves and other natural resources. Unilateral development programs by each, without regard to the other's goals, almost surely would work to the detriment of both.

A major fact which must be kept in mind is that benefits from the claims settlement, as historic and large as it is, will evolve much more slowly than some have anticipated.

The settlement provides no large lump-sum payment initially and the annual payments are relatively small when compared to needs in economic development in the vastness of rural Alaska.

When we stop to realize that Alaska's \$900 million in north slope oil bonus monies did not begin to magically solve all the state's human resource needs, we must realistically acknowledge that the annual claims settlement payments amounting to only a small fraction of that huge amount will take time to produce dramatic changes.

In addition, the 2 per cent overriding royalty on mineral production in Alaska which will contribute as estimated \$500 million to the settlement will derive mainly for several years to come from north slope production through the trans-Alaska pipeline. And, of course, construction is yet to begin on the pipeline.

There are these, and many other considerations ahead of the claims settlement is implemented.

The settlement holds unprecedented possibilities for dramatically improving life in our state, not only for Natives but for all Alaskans. And Alaskans, working together, can achieve that.

—WILLIAM A. EGAN  
Governor of Alaska

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