

WRIGHT: BILL IS GOOD ...

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tings in many areas of Alaska.

"I think the AFN will continue to grow stronger, economically and politically, as a service organization on a statewide basis for assisting and initiating statewide programs," he said.

Focus for AFN efforts this year will be in Juneau where the Alaska State Legislature must pass laws, to "implement and dovetail into the treasures," Wright said.

The first actual jobs in implementing the land claims legislation for the AFN will be devising a method of conducting a roll and compiling plans for land selection. Two years are provided by the bill for compiling a complete list of Alaska natives.

"Decisions on mergers between regions, and which ones, must be made within one year," Wright commented.

Already several regions are talking about mergers. Among the prime candidates for merger seem to be the Tanana Chiefs and Copper River Region, which have been talking about combining for some time.

All of the regions, Wright believes are fairly well organized though some must go through some formalities. As AFN president, Wright intends to spend most of the next year in Anchorage, Juneau, and periodically in Washington, working on implementation of the bill and providing for a continuity program.

"The entire Alaska delegation and Governor Egan all deserve tremendous credit for their open, fair-minded approach to this issue and I want to thank them," Wright added.

"The leadership of the United States Congress that stood firmly behind the natives and the leaders from your villages who labored long and hard did the best they could," he told the assembled native representatives earlier. There were tremendous pressures on them. All of the views of all of these people are summarized in this one document.

Throughout the convention Wright received dozens of personal congratulations from AFN members and observers.

Interview with Senator Stevens ...

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cism of a meeting between Alaska's congressional delegation and Governor William A. Egan was "unfortunate."

John Borbridge, President of the Tlingit and Haida Indians' Central Council has been quoted as saying that the meeting "created a deep sense of native resentment."

The meeting was held, Stevens said, at the request of Senator Alan Bible (D-Nevada), who charged the elected officials with the task of coming up with a united position.

"Certainly the native leaders were involved all the way along," Stevens said. "I had met with the AFN leaders the night before..."

Pointing to an article in a recent issue of the Tundra Times in which Don Wright was described as saying that he was "greatly disappointed in the inability of the members of the Alaska Congressional delegation and the Governor of Alaska to unify on one solid land claims position," Stevens laughed and said, "Then we got together to do it and we got criticized."

Senator Stevens said that he believes the President will sign the bill into law.

Then, he said, the Secretary of the Interior will have a short time frame for action. "We did this intentionally," he said.

Not only will the secretary have to make basic decisions about land withdrawals, Stevens said, but he will also have to set up procedures for hardship determinations.

"I talked with the secretary the day after the oil passed," he said. "He is going to set up department-wide briefings and

create a task force to start lining up procedures to follow in carrying out his heavy duties under the bill."

And, once the bill is signed, villages will have to start earmarking the land they want in terms of what they think the population will be. This can't be final, however, Stevens said, until the role of all natives is complete.

Because the state will be able to start selecting land immediately from land outside of the 25 townships—Stevens said that "we should see action from the state immediately."

Stevens also said that some of the things that aren't in the bill are significant by their omission. There is no competitive leasing provision in the legislation for example.

Nor is there any real restraint on the use of money "except that it flows through a corporate structure to the beneficiaries involved."

This is the first settlement in recent history, Stevens said, that has "not required a plan in advance from the people who are going to get the money."

Is there an agreement between the federal administration and the AFN that the President will not sign the bill into law unless it is approved by AFN?

"I don't know if such an agreement exists or not," Stevens said. "I hope we don't have to cross that bridge."

"If this settlement, which is the most generous in all of history" won't do, "I don't think we'll ever get a native land claims bill through again..."

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