

The specific rights were not then nor since defined, and their status remained in limbo. Thus, until now Congress has really avoided a confrontation with the complex and difficult issue.

Laws providing for native allotments and townsites have not met the problem head on. Court decisions have left much confusion. Nevertheless, it seems to be generally agreed, that without special enabling legislation by Congress, the Alaskan natives cannot sue and recover in the courts for lands taken from them, nor can they enforce claims for possession and control of the land against the Government or third parties. Specific enabling legislation in this regard was passed in 1935 for the Tlingit and Haida Indian claims in southeastern Alaska. Just 2 days ago—33 years after passage of this law—the President signed a bill to pay this claim.

I'll never forget the poignant statement one of our venerable old native chiefs delivered during the Senate hearings on these native land claims held in Anchorage, Alaska, last February. In his broken English, the eloquence of his message came through dramatically clear and unmistakable. He asked: "Has it ever occurred to you that maybe when you bought Aalska from the Russians, you bought stolen property?"

This brief narration of aboriginal claims in Alaska is enough, I believe, to show the tremendous failure on the part of the Government thus far to resolve this most difficult problem involving the Alaskan natives. For 92 years the Federal Government was the sole authority in this great State, yet nothing was done. Even at statehood the Congress retained, as it always has, the prime responsibility for dealing with the American Indian and the Alaskan native; yet to this date that responsibility has not been met, and nothing has been accomplished. Now, something must be done. Congress must act. This would seem to be an obvious statement, yet it was just as pressing and obvious in the year 1958, and in 1884, and in all the other years, but nothing was done.

Having now agreed after a century that some solution must be found, it is certain that finding the optimum answer will not be easy. Since the aboriginal claims began to be pressed in earnest in 1966, great progress has been made. Fortunately too, we have strewn behind us the myriad solutions to similar problems in other areas, including mistakes I trust we will not repeat here.

I can think of no more appropriate way to fully demonstrate the urgent need for action on this vital issue than by introducing the strong and dynamic leaders of Alaska, our distinguished Governor, the Honorable Walter J. Hickel, and representatives of the various Alaskan native groups. In addition to the Governor, the Alaskans in attendance are:

ALASKA FEDERATION OF NATIVES

Mr. Emil Notti, president; Mr. Don Wright, president, Cook Inlet Native Association; Mr. John Borbridge, president, Central Council of Tlingit & Haida Indians of Alaska; State Representative Willie Hensley; Mr. Cliff Groh, attorney; Mr. Barry Jackson, attorney.

THE ALEUT LEAGUE

Mr. Flore Lekanof, executive director, Alaska State community action program; Mr. Roger Connor, attorney.

Other individuals who will be addressing the committee are:

The Honorable Ernest Gruening, U.S. Senator, Alaska; Mrs. Laura Bergt, member of Governor's task force on native land claims; Mr. Charles Edwardson, speaking as an individual.

In closing, I would like to say that without question this is one of the most difficult problems to face the people of the State of Alaska in many years, and perhaps the most difficult of the entire century of our existence. First as a district, then as a territory, and now as a State under the American flag. It became all the more complicated when the Secretary of Interior elected to impose a freeze on all public land transactions about the time Governor Hickel took office as chief executive of Alaska. It seems incredible that so much time has passed without a solution to this most basic and unresolved conflict. We all know that such things take time, but a century is really far too long for any logical rationalization. It devolves upon us to finally resolve this complex issue somehow.

(The supplemental statement to be supplied by Mr. Pollock, above referred to, follows:)