

During the debates on the bill that became the Alaska Statehood Act, a number of distinguished statesmen, particularly the Honorable Ed Edmondson, advocated amendments to the bill so as to provide a mechanism for resolving the problem of any State selection of lands which might conflict with native occupancy rights. However, Congress in its wisdom, decided to postpone the final resolution of this problem to a later day. We trust that the day is now and that in its resolution of the problem the Congress will act fairly and honorably as it has in the past.

Some complain that for the Congress to deal with the native groups to acquire the native lands in order to fulfill the commitment of the State of some 103 million acres would result in a great drain on the Federal Treasury, considering the oil, gas, and other valuable resources of the lands. It is further argued that since lands held by native title are not constitutionally protected against a taking by the United States, and for purpose of avoiding such a drain on the Treasury, Congress should expropriate the native lands or pay a unilaterally fixed amount far below the value of the lands.

These are akin to the arguments of our earlier history which sought to place a dollar sign on national honor and integrity and which Congress rejected when it purchased the lands of the Indian tribes of the first 48 States.

The natives of Alaska are aware that efforts to work out fair and equitable solutions of their occupancy rights are fraught with great complexities and conflicting pressures. We understand that accommodations must be made in the national interest and in the interest of the State of Alaska.

I believe that the natives of Alaska are prepared to make reasonable accommodations. This is evidenced by the substantive proposals which were drafted with the participation of the native leaders and have been incorporated in H.R. 15049. This bill was drafted under great pressure of time. We recognize the need for technical amendments.

We reject H.R. 17129 as illiberal and as misconceived in many important respects.

Finally, may I say that we trust and believe that, in accordance with the Federal policy which has prevailed throughout the history of our Nation, and as a matter of fairness and equity, this committee will seek and obtain a consensus of the native groups of Alaska before approving any acquisition or disposition of the native lands.

This concludes, Mr. Chairman, the formal testimony.

Mr. HALEY. Thank you very much. Let me explain our situation, as I see it.

Under the rules of our committee when this bell rings, which it will in a minute or two, the committee will have to rise—you hear the bells now—and what we will attempt to do, and it will take unanimous consent, is to go to the floor of the House and ask for unanimous consent to sit during general debate today on the bills on the agenda of the House. I hope we can obtain that. I hope that all the members who possibly can will try to be back here at 2 o'clock, and we will continue the hearings and hear the other witnesses this afternoon, or if necessary, until we can dispose of the testimony of the people who have come here from the great State of Alaska to present their case