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The Cook Inlet Native Association has urged the United States Senate to confirm the appointment of Alaska's Gov. Walter J. Hickel as Secretary of Interior in the new cabinet of President-elect Richard M. Nixon.

The action was taken Saturday as Association President Don Wright polled the governing board of directors by telephone pursuant to the organization's by-laws. The Cook Inlet group has approximately 200 Native members in the Greater Anchorage area.

**SUPPORT FROM** the Association came at a time when opposition to the Hickel appointment appeared to be mounting in Washington. Members of the Eastern press establishment have been increasingly critical of the governor's conservation views. Others have suggested Hickel is in concert with the major oil interests in the country and that he has relegated Native matters to a position of secondary importance during his two-year tenure in office.

But the most important issue confronting the state's Native population of roughly 50,000 is the adjudication of their aboriginal land claims against the state and federal governments. "We have the personal assurance of the Governor," said Wright, "that he will press for speedy Congressional action on the land claims bill and that he will protect Native interests while the bill is pending before Congress."

Hickel, as governor, has been deeply embroiled in the land claims controversy. The state's Natives, by choice, have moved for a political rather than a legal settlement of their claims, and have sought action from both the state and national legislatures.

**TWO YEARS** ago, Secretary of Interior Stewart Udall clamped a so-called "land freeze" on the state, forbidding conveyance of federal lands selected by Alaska pursuant to the Statehood Act of 1958.

On December 11, the day Hickel's appointment was announced, Udall issued a further executive order withdrawing some 260 million acres of federal land in Alaska from selection by the state or any other party. Udall justified both moves as being designed to protect Native lands from possible alienation prior to settlement of the claims dispute.

Both orders were severely criticized by Hickel as "tending to set one group of citizens against another," and being

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## Native Group Boosts Hickel

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"calculated to send the state down the tubes."

**THE LAND freeze** has been declared unconstitutional by the U.S. District Court sitting in Anchorage.

Hickel, however, has consistently placed himself on record as favoring a "generous" land claims settlement. Under his direction, a "task force" was set up during 1967 to study the matter. The force, consisting of representatives from the native groups, state government and Department of Interior, recommended a package amounting to 40 million acres of land and \$500 million in monetary compensation for the various tribes and villages.

A bill encompassing those provisions was introduced by Sen. Ernest Gruening during the last Congressional session. It failed to come to a vote, however, suffering from a conspicuous lack of support from both the Interior Department and the Bureau of the Budget. A \$50 million land claims package passed by the state died last October when Udall failed to lift the land freeze.

**HICKEL HAS** been urged by the state's native groups to maintain both the freeze and the withdrawal, but he has said only that he will "protect native interests," while Congress deliberates the claims situation.

Some native leaders have suggested that the freeze and the withdrawal are their only leverage with Congress, while others have maintained that a sympathetic Secretary of Interior is a more valuable political asset than either the freeze or the withdrawal. Wright stressed the governor's promise of continued support for state and federal claims legislation.

"We know we will have the ear of Mr. Hickel in Washington," said Wright, "as we have had it in Juneau. Failure of the Senate to confirm the appointment would be a severe blow to the state of Alaska and its native population."

# Native Group Backs Hickel Appointment