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Interest Group Competition and the Alaska Native Land Claims Settlement Act

ABSTRACT

This article examines the competition among three main sets of interest groups during the struggle to resolve the Native land claims issue: the Natives, the development interests (oil companies and the state of Alaska) and conservation interests (environmentalists and the Department of Interior). We examine the history of the Native land claims struggle as it was waged in the courts and in Congress, paying particular attention to the behavior of the various interest groups as they competed against one another. We also conduct an analysis of the voting behavior in the United States House of Representatives, where roll call voting data is available for votes on amendments in which the conservation and development interests had clear objectives. From both the historical and econometric voting analysis, we found that environmentalists and the oil industry significantly affected the final form of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (ANCSA)¹ settled land claims by approximately 55,000 Alaskan Natives (Inupiat, Yupik, Aleuts, Athabascan, Tlingit, and Haida Indians),² enabled development of the oil fields in Prudhoe Bay, and set the stage for the largest conservation withdrawals in United States history. The Native land claims arose in 1867, when the United States purchased Alaska from Russia. In addition to granting the Natives 40 million acres of land and \$962.5 million for

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1. Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, 43 U.S.C. §§ 1601-1629 (1994).

2. We follow the Alaska convention of capitalizing the word "Native" to distinguish it from "native" Alaskans, where the latter includes all people who have lived in Alaska a generation or more. However, in some quotations, the lower case "native" is taken to mean "Native." See ROBERT D. ARNOLD, ET AL., ALASKA NATIVE LAND CLAIMS 9 (1978) (for a map showing the geographic distribution of the Alaskan Natives as well as the various divisions within each group).