

UTA...

Tribal leaders from villages across Alaska will be gathering in Anchorage October 17-19 to discuss issues of tribal sovereignty and problems facing Alaska Natives after 1991.

Those taking part in the first General Assembly of the United Tribes of Alaska since it was founded last May will be paying close attention to the rights of Alaska Natives born after the passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in 1971, and how to protect Native lands from alienation after 1991.

Leaders from the different village tribal governments will also be very interested in gathering information helpful to them as they seek to exercise their sovereignty.

Bert Hirsch, an attorney who has represented many Outside tribal governments, will direct a workshop on the Indian Tribal Governmental Tax Status Act to be presented by the

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UTA conference hosts workshops

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Association on American Indian Affairs on the opening day.

Hirsch took part in a two-day conference last March which dealt with tribal governments formed under the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 and which was sponsored by the Alaska Federation of Natives.

Hirsch then advised tribal leaders to exercise their governmental powers, whether or not other entities, such as state governments, believed they had the right to do so. Opponents of tribal government in Alaska frequently argue that ANCSA virtually stripped Alaska Native governments of the sovereign powers practised by many Indian governments on reservations in the Lower 48.

Senator Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, has publicly proclaimed that the powers of tribal governments is a matter to be determined by the legislature and governor of Alaska. Tribal leaders hotly protest this viewpoint, arguing that tribal jurisdiction and sovereignty have always been protected by a special "trust" relationship with the federal government, and is not subject to the whims of state leadership.

States should deal with tribes in a government to government relationship, they argue. UTA members this year are particularly displeased that Alaska Governor Sheffield will

not be speaking to them, and that he has not given them any indication of how he will deal with tribal governments.

In a recent letter to UTA Chairman Willie Goodwin, Sheffield said he had contacted organizations across the state to get their input into the issue before coming out with any kind of statement.

Andy Hope, Manager of the Sitka Community Association, the IRA government of that community, has argued that the subject is between Sheffield and the different tribal governments, and no one else. He also charges that Sheffield, whose press secretary, Pete Spivey, says cannot make the UTA meeting because of a prior television commitment, is avoiding direct interaction with the tribes and is instead trying to negotiate through the media.

Sheffield will be participating in the AFN Convention which will begin immediately after the UTA meetings.

The workshop will begin at 1:30 p.m. on Monday, the 17th and will be held at the Anchorage Westward Hilton. Registration will follow from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m.

The assembly will be called to order at 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday by Chairman Goodwin, after which members will be appointed to four committees: the Credentials Committee, the Charter Committee, the Election Procedures Committee

and the Resolutions Committee.

Russel Barsh, the Associate Professor of Business, Government and Society at the University of Washington will be the featured speaker of the morning. Following Barsh's address, there will be a panel and floor discussion of issues relating to the administration of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Alaska.

Thomas Berger, the director of the Alaska Native Review Commission, which was founded by the Inuit Circumpolar Conference to look into the effects of ANCSA so far will address the group in the afternoon. Other speakers will include Edwin Phelps, Educational Services Group, Management Concepts, and Steve Cowper, Chairman of the Board of Trustees Alaska Permanent Fund Corporation.

Speakers on Wednesday will include Rick Erlich, an attorney who will address the future status of Alaska Native lands and Alaska Native children; Sam Kito, Chairman of AFN and Linda Baker from the U.S. Department of the Interior's Office of Inspector General.

There will also be panel discussions on Alaska Native Fisheries issues, health issues and state and tribal relations. Resolutions will be passed and elections held for new officers. Fundraising activities will be held both nights.