

A vision for subsistence

By Mary Miller

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Matthew Iya wrote the following:

I contend we must come together as the Alaska Native community and set a long term goal of getting our inherent right to a subsistence lifestyle reinstated unequivocally. This involves the heart and committing to taking however long to achieve this goal. We will have to re-evaluate the approach taken at the national level on Native initiatives. We cannot afford to have our Congressional delegation calling the shots of what we should be seeking and what we are allowed to envision for our futures.

In the year of the indigenous peoples proclaimed by the United Nations, we must extend ourselves beyond the federal level and seek solutions at the international level and present our situation as a human rights issue. The legal and political process have failed use. We are at an extremely critical crossroads in our

existence as Native peoples. How we choose to address these fundamental problems which threaten our survival as distinct peoples will determine whether we succeed in protecting our lifestyles, livelihood and way of life for generations to come. Any more compromise is an unacceptable loss.

Let us be strong enough to face up to the mistakes we have made and honestly and openly seek new approaches at higher levels which will be most beneficial to our Native people. These ideas will require the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, RurAL CAP, the Alaska Federation of Natives and others to set aside differences, organizational boundaries and mesh together to unite, create a common vision, seek solutions, and utilize resource people while not wavering from this common vision.

These insights can form the foundation for the Native community to come together and set a long range strategy

as it takes to regain our legal and inherent rights to lifestyles on which our histories are built and the cultural identities of our ancestors are rooted.

Matthew left us his vision

and pointed us in the direction to get there. I ask the Native community, the Elders and others: Do we have the will?

Editor's note: Matthew Iya, the executive director of the Eskimo Walrus Commission died Feb. 8. The author is Mary Miller, director of tribal affairs for Nome based Kawerak.

