

# Babbitt, Deer are gracious guests and open-minded

Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt and Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Ada Deer have completed an unprecedented expedition to Alaska to study a host of resource management and other issues of concern to Alaska Natives.

While both were remarkably well-versed on Alaska before they came, Babbitt in particular experienced some revelations. For example, the secretary confessed that subsistence was a new issue for him, and was an avid student of local views as he travelled throughout village Alaska. Both were also refreshingly candid. They committed themselves strongly to open lines of communication and building partnerships with Alaskans to solve problems. Otherwise, their promises were limited, but had the welcome ring of sincerity.

Perhaps most encouraging, Babbitt portrayed himself as action-oriented, able and willing to go quickly to the heart of a matter; a man with little patience for posturing. In Anchorage, he told an audience, "I'm not very interested in abstract debates that lead to nothing."

But Babbitt makes a clear distinction between rhetorical jam sessions and serious talk, noting that "Talk is the prelude to decision, which is the ingredient of action and success."

The secretary invited friends and adversaries alike to check their philosophies and political arguments at the door, to sit down and figure out "how are we going to make this work on the ground. I'm confident that we can make a lot of headway if we just sit down and do it. I'm willing to do it, and I'm going to start," Babbitt told the *Tundra Times* in Dillingham.

Now that their expedition has completed its fact-finding mission, the hard part begins, for them and for anyone who cares about any of the issues over which they have so much responsibility. But regardless of how their policies evolve, Bruce Babbitt and Ada Deer were gracious guests. We thank them for coming and look forward to their return.