

New State Environmental Head Addresses AFN Members

BARROW—Max Brewer, director of the Arctic Research Lab, asked members of the Alaska Federation of Natives to take a critical look at the problems of their state.

Speaking to board members meeting in Barrow, Brewer pleaded for a careful look at causes and, in doing so, tipped his hand to the approach he will take as head of Alaska's newly formed Department of Environment.

"What you see here in Barrow we are going to see over much of Alaska during the next 10 years," he predicted. "Barrow is the largest of villages in the state of Alaska with the largest percentage of Native population. We have real growing pains and there are obvious problems. We don't have to look much beyond the edge of the street to see them.

"Sewer, sanitation, housing... all these cause difficulties. Yet the temperature here in Barrow is no worse than Montana or North Dakota. We don't have the extremes. Our lowest temperature is 56 below. It's -70.6 on the Wyoming border. Our high average is 76 above. "In Montana it's hotter than Hell. What makes the big difference is time. Eight months of winter and sometimes three more to go with it. The light and darkness. Whether we like it or not we tend to set our inner clocks by the sun."

In the past there were four of five families at every creek mouth and the North Slope would not support a town of more than 350 by subsistence. This life style left the environment in good shape, Brewer said.

"Then the non-native arrived, the government started paying the fuel bill and everyone heaved their garbage out the back door." he said calling attention to the sea of oil drums behind the Arctic Research Lab.

"They write about the nomadic Eskimo but the Native plans to be here a long time. It's the non-native who comes into the Arctic who is the nomad, just planning for the short term!"

Sewer and water problems remain unsolved because people tend to look at them with state-side engineering background and past experience, the scientist

maintained.

Barrow is still sending its high school students outside for an education although it's possible to be educated in the bush and still pass the metropolitan achievement test.

"I offer my own five youngsters as an experiment. Until last year the only school they ever attended was BIA school. Their one real advantage is they went outside to terrorize the grandmothers a week or two each summer."

Brewer suggested Alaskan bush youngsters be given more chance to see the outside world, possibly in the fourth, seventh, ninth and tenth grades.

"Let them see and let them come home and I don't believe you'll have a lot of the education problems you do today."

On building: "If you want to build something at the North Pole you take a little piece of New York City and move it here. It's a terrible mistake not to live with our environment but to fight it."

He said contractors generally estimate the cost of Arctic building too high. The \$2 million Arctic Research Lab was built cheaper than you could build in Fairbanks and at only 1.7 times Seattle costs including Union wage, he noted.

"We should be able to build cheaper than Fairbanks because if we plan we have sea transport."

As for pollution problems in the North, these cannot be met with stock stateside solutions, either.

"One of our secretaries jum-

ped on us because we use phosphate detergent but up here we're dealing with an ocean that is deficient in phosphate. If every one of us could use 10 times as much phosphate as we do now we would be adding to the environment.

The Navy is planning a sewage treatment plant which may also be the wrong approach. Brewer reported tests of the lagoon where the lab is currently dumping sewerage shows it to be the cleanest water in the whole area.

"We've got to take a look at the problems and find out what in Sam Hill we're dealing

with and then find solutions to correct it and I don't think solutions applied stateside and otherwise will necessarily cover."