

Eskimo Politicians Score

by MARGIE BAUMAN
(Courtesy of Anchorage Daily
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NOME — A contingent of Eskimo delegates making their debut in partisan politics stepped into the driver's seat of the Northwest Alaska Democratic Convention, winning most delegate spots to the state convention.

As a fresh layer of spring snow fell on Nome Saturday and early Sunday, the "Bush Caucus" quietly garnered their seats in Fairbanks' approaching statewide convention, and elected as district chairman, Eben Hopson of Barrow, special assistant on native affairs to Gov. William A. Egan.

"The 'old guard' people who were there don't want to talk to me," said Al Nakak, a 24-year-old Eskimo from Nome who actively organized for the convention and led the "Bush Caucus" although he was not a delegate.

"The 'old guard' had been in power for 70 to 80 years and they're not used to being questioned," he said.

A few old-timers tried unsuccessfully to remove Nakak from the caucus.

Some called it "Eskimo political savvy", others "Eskimo power" or "Bush power", but by any definition, it was a spring housecleaning that swept Nome off center as a power bloc.

At the end of the 12 hour convention, Eben Hopson congratulated the delegates for their solidarity as Democrats, noting some splits in another District convention in Alaska this spring.

The Convention passed a number of resolutions and platform proposals, including those of the education committee, calling for the state to "provide educational opportunities so that no Alaskan need leave the state to receive a high school education."

Also adopted were education resolutions to: expand the number of high schools in villages and increase the number of area high schools so that children can be educated near home; provide bi-lingual education in all schools "including those in Anchorage and Fairbanks, where students speak the Native languages; teach early grades in the Native language at schools where English is taught as a second language.