

ANRC Hears Anchorage Testimonies

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Judge Berger didn't know what he was going to hear on the first morning of public testimony from Alaska's largest and most diverse Native population; Anchorage. The Alaska Native Review Commission (ANRC) met February 20-21 in Anchorage to hear concerns, questions, and opinions regarding Native issues from Natives and non-Natives. Children born after 1971 was a main concern expressed by many who felt the ANCSA did not provide adequate provision. Under present conditions stated by ANCSA these "new Natives" will not receive corporate shares or voting power or be recipients of dividends allocated to their Native parents. One man complained that ANCSA doesn't even recognize his child as Native.

David Sam, a Tlingit from Sitka who has lived in Anchorage for fourteen years, said that "we have a moral obligation to our children." He has a daughter who is five years old and he doesn't know how to tell her that she has been left out.

Many expressed their fears about 1991 - the year restrictions will be lifted on Native owned shares. They fear the loss of Native culture to the western culture if stock is sold freely. This is a major concern shared by most Natives in Alaska said Mary Kancewick, a lawyer on the ANRC staff. She has traveled with Judge Berger to most villages and feels from the testimonies that she has heard that rural Natives do not want to lose their lands through sale of their shares. She said that land is their major identity and for many a subsistence way of life.

The three year resident of Alaska expressed concern for Natives living in cities who have integrated into the dominant culture and do not feel the same concerns as their rural brethren. She said the urban Natives need to reconfirm their Native identities because their culture is like the roots of a plant with outside influence as new leaves that grow. A Native person who

severs the roots has forgotten the rich heritage and Native culture. She added, however, that Natives are under-going tremendous changes and the "only thing that stays the same is that everything changes."

It hasn't been easy for many who attended this meeting. Some wept openly as they expressed their doubts in the corporate structure; which has become a faction of Native culture in Alaska.

"We don't own land, the corporation owns our land and they can dispose of it anyway they want," Archie Gottshalk told the commission. He said he was too young to understand the implications of ANCSA in 1971 and as leader of his village, Naknek, he helped with the selection of hunting grounds according to the newly passed law. He didn't realize that in their small victory of acquiring land "north of the river" that they had in summary lost the other lands that had been theirs for generations. He added that ANRC is the only form the people have for expressing their concerns.

A husband of a shareholder complained that integrating into the corporate business structure was too much to expect Natives to do in fourteen years since the passage of ANCSA. He believed Native owned stock should not be

saleable in 1991.

Native Academic Advisor and Professor at U.A.A., Anchorage, Dr. Ted Mala, said that the western way of life is being infiltrated in the villages by way of television, media, and commercial travel and that people are experiencing conflict in their lives today. In the past, the great hunter was a coveted status but today the person making the most money is emulated. With money comes modern facilities such as electricity and heat which allow more leisure time for people in the villages. This results in lack of purpose and depression apparent in many villages today. One area of real conflict, Dr. Mala told Judge Berger, is in education. He complained that rural students are not receiving adequate education to compete on academic levels in post-secondary schools. According to a survey conducted last year on Native students attending U.A.A., Anchorage and Anchorage Community College, the biggest complaints expressed by students was that rural high schools did not prepare them for college. He stresses that teachers should set higher teaching standards.

Judge Berger, ANRC Commissioner, has traveled to fifty-five villages in Alaska and has listened to 1,200 or more Native and

non-Native testimonies regarding Native issues. He has five more villages to visit before he completes his study next month. He

said the main concern expressed most is fear of losing Native lands. He will make his report public by September of this year.