Maniilaq responds to NSB on detachment

We are disturbed by the efforts of some of the North Slope Borough's hired staff to discredit our efforts to give the residents of our region the opportunity to exercise their constitutional right to self-government.

We have worked hard to develop a long-term economic base for our people. The Red Dog mine, presently located within the North Slope Borough, will not only provide critical jobs, but it can also provide a tax base necessary for the establishment of a borough government for our people.

When the North Slope Borough boundary was proposed in 1971 we objected to it. Unfortunately we did not have funds to send people to the Local Boundary Commission hearing where the decision was made to override our objection. Our objection was then, and is still, based on the fact that the lands in question are traditionally used by the residents of our region, especially by the people of Noatak and Kivalina.

This fact was formally recognized in 1972 by officials of the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation when they agreed to the boundaries that now separate the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation and the NANA Regional Corporation. These corporation boundaries leave two million acres of traditional NANA lands within the North Slope Borough. It is this land that we are seeking to detach from the North Slope Borough.

The people of our region have only two alternatives for detachment of the disputed lands which would place the North Slope Borough boundary where it belongs. Under state law, the North Slope Borough can petition the Local Boundary Commission for a boundary change or the Commissioner of Department of Community and Regional Affairs can petition for a change. In the interest of harmony, we have met with staff and the North Slope Borough assembly numerous times in the past three years to discuss this issue. Our efforts culminated in an agreement that would have had the North Slope Borough petition for detachment had their residents agreed in a referendum vote held October 1, 1985. Unfortunately, by a slim margin, the residents of the North Slope Borough rejected the plan between the two regions to resolve this issue.

The only option left for us was to request that the Commissioner of Community and Regional Affairs petition the Local Boundary Commission for the detachment on our behalf. We have made that request, and hope that the Commissioner will ensure that the merits of our position are pesented to the LBC through the public process. There is no other way that our position can be heard and a decision made to correct the boundary error.

After three years of discussion and negotiation with our North Slope neighbors, we are unhappy that an agreement could not be reached, and that we are now forced to go to DCRA to reclaim our traditional lands. We believe that our position is morally and legally right and will prevail if we are given our constitutional rights to due process.