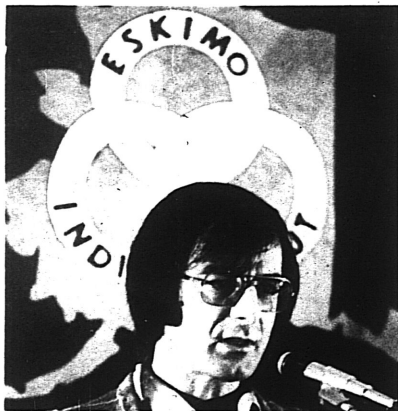


Natives can advance without losing tribal identity



Tanana Chiefs Conference President "Spud" Williams

By LINDA LORD-JENKINS
Tundra Times Editor

Alaska Natives can advance with the rest of the state and nation without losing their tribal identity, according to one speaker on an AFN convention panel devoted to discussing tribalism.

William "Spud" Williams, president of the Tanana Chiefs Conference, told AFN convention delegates that it is possible to advance in technology and education without losing identity as an Alaska Native.

But they must remember who they are and fight to preserve the organizations that are their tribes, said Williams.

He spoke on a panel which included Tlingit/Haida Central Council president John Hope and Dennis Tiepelman, the AFN lobbyist in Washington, D.C.

Hope and Tiepelman spoke primarily of the proposed federal government budget cuts which will wipe out many of the services to Alaska Natives. Those services include many of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Day Schools, job training programs, health care to some areas, and general assistance funds.

But despite the grim picture, Williams told the delegates to not lose themselves in despair over the budget cuts.

"We have been here for thousands and thousands of years and don't forget it. We've had our own govern-

ment. Don't get worked up about those cuts. We've had government without those budget cuts in the past and we'll have our government in the future."

Williams said many of the Native regional non-profit corporations have "become" the BIA, the Indian Health Service, the Comprehensive Training and Employment Act. "We have become the bureaucrat's bureaucrat."

He said Native corporations have to be very careful not to fall into the trap of becoming the government and forgetting that they are tribal organizations.

"We should not be an extension of the federal or state government or any other government than ourselves," Williams told the group.

He said the attempts to wipe out tribal governments have been fairly successful, and for Alaska Natives to combat that, they should remember who they are.

"The education process has told us we are all U.S. citizens. True.

"But above all else we are Alaska Natives first. We are citizens of the United States second and citizens of the state government third."

Williams quoted people as saying the state and federal government "gave" Alaska Natives 44 million acres of land and \$500 million. "They didn't give us***.

"The only reason they be-

came interested in 'giving' us something is when they found oil. Now they are trying to steal our identity."

He recounted recent state challenges to the Indian Reservation Act, the Indian Child Welfare Act, and the provision of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act as it applies to submerged lands and said the state is now trying to "take away our identity."

"They say the Land Claims Act washed our skins white and cleansed our souls of Indianness."

He said that Alaska Natives should fight this governmental attempt to stamp out Natives by sitting down and "teaching children what it is to be an Indian."

Natives will have to do that because the education system won't, said Williams. "Where are our television programs on Indian heroes . . . We have to continue to educate our youth on what it is to be Indian."

That isn't a difficult thing to do, said Williams who referred to the Polish people who have been conquered repeatedly and are now engaged in a fight to retain their rights and identity, and to the Japanese who have become "Westernized" but have retained their identities.

"There are still Japanese and Polish cultures. Will they be able to say the same for us? Will they one day talk about Alaska Natives or Native Alaskans?"