

# UTA won't discuss sovereignty

By Bill Hess

Tundra Times

Questions of tribal sovereignty and how to deal with land and the rights of Alaska Natives born after 1971 are expected to dominate the first General Assembly of the United Tribes of Alaska. The meeting, which is open to all Alaska Natives and especially to representatives of tribal governments, will be held at the Anchorage Westward Hilton Oct. 18-19.

"We will have several different speakers," UTA Chairman Willie Goodwin of Kotzebue said after a planning meeting, "and we'll pass resolutions. We are not sure yet if we are going to do much with work-

shops."

Although not all of the speakers have yet been confirmed, Goodwin said that Canadian Justice Thomas R. Berger will be one of the main presenters featured at the meeting. Berger has been chosen to chair the Inuit Circumpolar Conference sponsored Alaska Native Review Commission, which has been charged with conducting an objective study of the affects of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement of 1971.

Berger headed up the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry which investigated the impact which the construction of a pipeline through one of Canada's great, unspoiled wilder-

ness areas would have on the land and the people. Berger's findings, reached after hearing testimony from the people of virtually all of the villages in the region, led to the Mackenzie project being disbanded.

Goodwin noted that although Governor Bill Sheffield had originally declined UTA's invitation to speak on the grounds that his schedule prevented it, the governor told him over a drink in Kotzebue that he would attend.

The Alaska Native legislators and some of the leaders of the Alaska Federation of Natives, who will be holding their convention immediately after UTA's get-together, have

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# UTA won't discuss sovereignty with Sheffield

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also been invited to speak.

According to Goodwin, the main issues to be discussed at the assembly will be the handling of U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs monies to the tribes and questions of what will happen to land held by Alaska Natives after 1991, and what rights will Native children born after 1971 have.

Under ANCSA, Alaska Natives were left with 44 million acres of land and paid just under \$1 billion for the rest of Alaska, which they lost. The money and the land

was put under the control of state-chartered village and regional corporations, and would be subject to sale and taxation after 1991.

Traditionally, lands which are held in trust for Native Americans by the United States cannot be sold to non-Natives and is not subject to state control or taxation. Many members of UTA seek to have such a trust status restored.

There are more than 200 Native villages in Alaska, and 37 representatives of different village tribal governments signed the UTA charter in May.

Goodwin said that several more have joined or expressed interest in joining, but he won't be satisfied until virtually every Native government in Alaska is represented.

Membership is open not only to governments chartered under the federal Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, but to traditional tribal governments as well.

UTA and tribal leaders face some stiff opposition in their goal of asserting tribal sovereignty protected under the federal trust relationship. Alaska

Senator Ted Stevens, regarded by some as one of the more powerful men in the U.S. Congress spoke out against this sovereignty in an address to the Alaska State legislature last February.

"Some have sought a federally derived Native sovereignty," Stevens said, "a sovereignty not dependent upon our state's constitution or our laws. It has, and will continue to be, my position that village sovereignty is a matter for our state through this legislature and the governor to determine."

In its first resolution passed

last May, UTA declared Stevens's statement to be "in direct conflict with the most fundamental precepts of Indian law," and urged the senator to "withdraw the remark in writing to members of the Alaska State legislature, and to reconsider his position on tribal sovereignty."

UTA has also called upon Governor Sheffield to work with the legislature to develop a "fact-finding and resolution body" to work with Alaska Natives in ironing out problems which arise.