

Part one of series –

FAA charged with history of anti-Native bias

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The federal government is the largest employer in the state of Alaska. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), a division of the Department of Transportation, employs 1600 Alaskans in rural and urban sites.

Although roughly 20 out of 100 Alaska residents are Alaska Natives (Eskimos, Indians and Aleuts), only 80-90 Alaska Natives are part of the FAA's 1600

full-time, employee roster. This means that, while Natives comprise 20 percent of the state's population, only 5 percent of the FAA's staff are Alaska Natives. Furthermore, three-quarters of this 5 percent figure are employed in clerical and low-wage positions.

It comes as no surprise that two ancestors to Alaska's first inhabitants, an Aleut named Frank Pagano, and a Tlingit Indi-
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an named Frank Peratrovich, have filed individual discriminations complaints and a joint class action discrimination complaint against the FAA.

Pagano, an FAA Civil Rights Specialist for eight years, and Peratrovich, the Director of the Bureau of Census in Alaska, applied in early 1979 for a job opening with the agency, that of Chief of the FAA's Civil Rights staff, Alaska Region (GS 13-14).

After both were rejected in favor of a female white employee, who had never worked for civil rights, they filed individual "Complaints of Discrimination in the Federal Government."

Pagano, in lodging his discrimination complaint against the agency, stated, "I have been discriminated against because I am an Alaska Native (Aleut). FAA Management during the past years has neglected to insure and provide equal opportunity for the Alaska Natives in employment, training and promotional opportunities. The FAA Management has not hired a journeyman Alaska Native in any occupation since approximately 1975. No Alaska Native has been promoted to a position of responsibility. The training programs have not been equally represented with Alaska Natives (in attendance)."

Pagano has asked that several management people "be removed from their positions because they have not insured equal opportunities for Alaska Natives."

Peratrovich declared in his individual discrimination complaint that "For years qualified Native applicants (outside the FAA) have attempted to be em-

ployed by FAA. Even though I was the most qualified applicant, FAA hired a non-Alaska Native with no experience in equal employment opportunities, thus continuing their pattern of systematic discrimination against other Alaska Natives and myself."

Both men requested, in their separate complaints, that one of them be hired for the job they had both applied for, with back pay as part of the corrective action. Peratrovich's complaint additionally requested "Similar affirmative relief for other Alaska Natives who have applied for employment with the FAA for the past three years."

Pagano and Peratrovich also filed a class action discrimination complaint against the FAA, which means they are also filing their charges on behalf of 70,000 Alaska Natives. They filed both individual and class action complaints "in order to end the FAA's present and past practices of invidious racial discrimination against us individually and against other people of our race."

In the broader spectrum, they have charged that the FAA doesn't equally employ, train and promote Alaska Natives. In particular, they have charged that the FAA "as a matter of practice has not promoted Alaska Natives who complained about discriminations against Alaska Natives by FAA officials."

The individual and class action complaints include more allegations: placement of Natives in undesirable locations; excessive, but inappropriate or inadequate, training programs and periods; lack of support and encouragement; slow (if at all) progression to the journeyman level; infre-

quent hiring of recruits; biased ranking factors for jobs and under-representation of Alaska Natives within the FAA.

In partial summary, the class action complaint states that "Alaska Natives have been denied employment opportunities not only in initial hire, but also in promotions. (And) Even though (both Pagano and Peratrovich) have had several years of experience in the field of civil rights,

the FAA selected a female Caucasian who had never worked in civil rights in the past."

Pagano, in an interview with the Tundra Times, declared that "Alaska Natives are not getting a fair share. They are being stuck in undesirable locations to pick-up the slack." He then ticked-off many names of Alaska Natives who have resigned, been terminated or fired. He spoke for himself, but he is fami-

liar with the history of FAA employees, past and present. Of them, he said, "These individuals who came up through the (FAA) programs can say how they had to prove themselves and their race over and over, and they can say whether or not they had a fair shake."

He added that "the FAA has the best opportunity to employ Alaska Natives in the state, and (Continued on page 12)

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they don't do it. They have numerous bush stations. And some of them are in or near villages, where there is a 75-90 percent Native population, and you don't see Native employees (at these stations.)"

Pagano is a man who has much on his mind. He further related that "Alaska Natives are just as intelligent and have the potential to be trained in electronics just like anyone else. However, when you have two people, and one is getting the breaks and go-

ing to school, and the Alaska Native doesn't get the breaks, and is dumped into a course that is above his head, and he bombs out, then the FAA says 'well, you failed.' Rather than helping him, they let him die."

He asked, "Who knows if he had the potential to go on, or if he needed time and help? — He just didn't get the chance." Some are lucky enough to "know how to take care of themselves in the system" that is hostile to most Natives, but they are few and far between.

He said that he wanted "those people responsible for allowing the discriminating practices of the past ten years — even though they are given the responsibility by the government to insure equal opportunity — to be relieved of their positions. I want people put here who will insure and rebuild the rapport with the Native community and have Natives applying again at the agency."

In summing up the situation, Pagano stated that "people have to be more than just concerned about getting the land. Equal opportunity will never come about with just corporate money — since only a few will be living and managing it — as long as Natives never work for an equal level. We will always be considered the lesser. We will always be begging for the crumb. And because we don't have Alaska Natives in management levels to insure that policies won't adversely effect Natives, we will never

go anyplace."

In attempting to secure employment and opportunities at one federal agency, the Federal Aviation Administration, Pagano and Peratrovich have filed several complaints. But after being informed by the Departmental Office of Civil Rights that their discrimination complaints may take more than 180 days to process, Pagano and Peratrovich contacted the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and asked them to step-in and assume jurisdiction over the complaints.

The complaints will take several months to process, but both men believe they have strong cases. They would like to change the facts that, as Pagano said, "Alaska Natives aren't applying to the federal government: Their older brothers or people before them never got in. The government wasn't the place to apply. The Natives aren't applying to our agency (the FAA)"

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