

**"I may not agree with what you say but I will defend unto death your right to say it" -VOLTAIRE**

# Editorial Comment

## *PRESERVING CULTURAL LANDS: AT THE HEART OF ALL ALASKA NATIVE ISSUES*

*Inside and outside the Native community in Alaska right now, there is heated debate raging about the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, about the "1991 amendments," referred to as S. B. 2065 or H. R. 4162, about sovereignty, and tribal self-governments.*

*Throughout the remainder of this year and perhaps on into the future, we can expect that debate to go on. Hopefully, some of the more pressing issues will be resolved with the passage of amendments to ANCSA this year. The other issues like sovereignty and tribal governments may have to wait for resolution simply because of the complexity and problems involved.*

*As our people come together in large meetings and small to talk about the issues, to define the problems and outline the issues, questions are being asked. Some of those problems were defined a long time ago. In 1966, Willie Hensley (Igagruk) made the statement: "...The problem is simply this: What are the rights of the Alaskan Natives to the property and resources upon which they have lived since time immemorial?" That question was answered with the passage of ANCSA in 1971.*

*ANCSA meant that Alaska Natives would receive fee simple title to more than 40 million acres of land and compensation for claims extinguished for \$962.5 million, which would be paid for over a number of years. The vehicle for delivery of the settlement was, of course, the corporate structure.*

*Fifteen years later, thirteen regional corporations and more than two hundred village corporations have managed to implement ANCSA with differing degrees of success, but some questions are still being asked.*

*Are the corporations capable of holding the lands which were fought for so long and hard? Corporations are vehicles which are fueled and driven by something called "profit." Can this vehicle be used to preserve the lands upon which we have lived since time immemorial?*

*A certain sense of doubt has been growing since the passage of ANCSA back in '71 about the ability of our people to make the corporations work in time and with enough strength to protect the lands. This pessimistic view has been more or less nurtured in the past two years by the Alaska Native Review Commission, with Thomas Berger's "Village Journey," and with the push for retribalization of the lands and sovereignty.*

*You and I have heard the statements time and again from friends and relatives alike "I'm going to sell my stock in 1991 because I didn't get anything from my corporation anyway." They're telling us, "Look at those corporations in my area filing bankruptcy and mismanaging our business corporations." The bitterness is there in abundance sometimes.*

*When we talk about subsistence, about our language and culture, about ANCSA and the 1991 amendments, about sovereignty and tribal self governments, about stock alienation or taxation, about Natives born after 1971 and where they fit into the scheme of things, about selling our stocks, etc., what are we really talking about?*

*At the heart of all Alaska Native issues is the concern for preserving our cultural lands. It is a concern that corporate executives, tribal leaders, stockholders, elders, and young people alike share, and it is a challenge that we must meet.*