

AFN Awaits Appointment of BIA Area Director

As of mid-January, AFN and the Alaska Native community are still waiting for a decision from the Interior Department in Washington on the hiring of a new BIA Area Director in Juneau. The process for filling the permanent position has been long and frustrating.

In early 1988, Jake Lestenkof, who had occupied the position since 1981, announced his resignation. Mr. Lestenkof left the BIA in March and subsequently was named Deputy Commissioner of Community and Regional Affairs in the Cowper administration. Since his departure, the Area Directorship has been filled by temporary appointments: first, Merritt Youngdeer and, subsequently, George Walters.

Prior to opening the BIA position for public recruitment, Assistant Interior Secretary Ross Swimmer pledged to AFN a consultation process on selection for this important position. The position was announced for 30 days of public recruitment on May 9, and information was published throughout Alaska. As individuals submitted their applications, Interior evaluated each candidate for eligibility. Those deemed to meet the standards for this Senior Executive Service position were identified, and in July four names were forwarded to AFN, all of whom were Native Americans with extensive experience in federal service. However, none was an Alaska Native.

On Aug. 4, AFN President Janie

Leask wrote to the Assistant Secretary requesting that the recruitment process be reopened and expressing astonishment at the fact that no Alaska Native candidate had been deemed eligible for a position which had been consistently filled by Alaska Natives since 1971. In response, the Department agreed to reopen public recruitment for three weeks, beginning Sept. 6. As a result of this second cycle, a list of eight names was forwarded to AFN at the end of November. The list included the original four names from outside Alaska (Joe Christie, William "Lynn" Engels, Patrick Hayes, and Merritt Youngdeer) and four Alaska Native candidates (John Hope, Flore Lekanof, Emil Notti and Al Williams). Subsequently, Mr. Youngdeer withdrew his application, having taken a position as Area Director in Muskogee, Oklahoma.

On Dec. 9, AFN Board members met to conduct interviews with the seven remaining candidates. The four Alaska Native candidates were present in person, and the three from outside the state were interviewed by conference calls. To assure even-handedness, a standard set of questions on Native issues and services was asked of each candidate.

The AFN Full Board met two days later and, based on the interviews and written resumes, voted by secret ballot for its top two recommendations. The Board selected John Hope, of Juneau, as its first recommendation and Emil

continued on page 4