

AFN Youth Convention Delegates Debate Sovereignty Issues

by George Irvin

The fifth annual Youth Convention of the Alaska Federation of Natives was held in Fairbanks on October 17-19, 1988. Despite higher travel costs for most students, the attendance was only slightly lower than in previous years.

REGISTRATION

A total of 351 Native high school students, representing 117 high schools in 110 communities registered for the convention. As in previous years, all student delegates registered by their respective ANCSA regions (according to their own ANCSA enrollment or, in the case of New Natives, by their parents' enrollment.)

The breakdown of attendance by regions was as follows: AHTNA, 5 students from 2 high schools; ALEUT, 12 students from 7 high schools; ARCTIC SLOPE, 42 students from 10 high schools; BERING STRAITS, 17 students from 13 high schools; BRISTOL BAY, 17 students from 10 high schools; CALISTA, 112 students from 36 high schools; CHUGACH, 3 students from 3 high schools; COOK INLET, 6 students from 6 high schools; DOYON, 70 students from 25 high schools; KONIAG, 28 students from 10 high schools; NANA, 13 students from 12 high schools; SEALASKA, 20 students from 9 high schools; AT-LARGE, 1 student from 1 high school; and NON-NATIVE OBSERVERS, 5 students from 2 high schools.

MINI-GRANTS

The highlight of the 1988 Youth Convention was the selection process by which AFN awarded a \$1,000 mini-grant to each of 12 high schools in Alaska. Prior to the convention, a written request for proposal was sent to every public high school in the state, offering to award a mini-grant to one school in each of the 12 ANCSA regions. The mini-grant would fund a small, student-planned, student-implemented project to reduce the local incidence of any six social problems: teen alcohol and drug abuse, teen suicide, teen pregnancy, family violence, drop-outs and run-aways.

Each high school which submitted a written application before the deadline competed against the other applicant schools from within its respective ANCSA region. Winners were to be selected in their regional caucuses of Youth Convention delegates with advice to be provided by Native elders. In short, the mini-grant concept put the power and responsibility for the whole process in the hands of students; to plan the applications at their high schools and submit them to AFN, to select the winners at the Youth Convention and to implement the winning projects back home during the two and a half months following the convention.

A total of 38 high schools submitted applications for the twelve mini-grants. An astounding 34 of the 38 chose the same topic: alcohol and drug abuse. (Three chose school drop-outs and one chose teen suicide.) Part of the reason for this pattern is that many Native students regard alcohol and drug abuse as a fundamental problem which contributes to all the other problems on the list. Nonetheless, the result provided a revealing look at how Native students, urban and rural, define the most important social problem facing them, their peers and their families.

Since no application was received from the Chugach region, AFN, in accordance with rules established by its Youth Council, transferred that mini-

grant to the region with the largest number of applications received. The Calista student caucus, with nine competing high school applications, received the extra mini-grant and was entitled to make two \$1,000 awards.

At the Youth Convention, the caucuses of students, assisted by the elders, worked for four solid hours to determine which high school in each region would win the competition. It was not an easy process and several of the votes were closely contested. At the end, the winners were as follows: AHTNA, Glennallen High School; ALEUT, Nelson Lagoon High School; ARCTIC SLOPE, Wainwright Alak High School; BERING STRAITS, Nome-Beltz High School; BRISTOL BAY, Newhalen High School; CALISTA, Napskiak Z.J. Williams High School and Mt. Village High School; COOK INLET, West Anchorage High School; DOYON, Galena High School; KONIAG, Akhiok High School; NANA, Kotzebue High School; and SEALASKA, Yakutat High School.

Written notice of the mini-grant award was presented at the podium to a representative of each of the 12 winning high schools by Alaska's Commissioner of Education, William Demmert. Following the convention, AFN executed a contract with each of the schools for implementation of the project during November, December and January. As this newsletter goes to press, the students of the 12 high schools are in various stages of implementing their projects and final reports on their activities and expenditures will be received by the end of January.

AFN has extended its sincere congratulations to the winning high schools and has expressed appreciation to all those who worked on submitting applications. It is important to note that the intention in all of this was not to create effective programs of alcohol and drug abuse prevention in 12 communities. Everyone recognizes that \$12,000 will not accomplish that. What was meant, rather, was to draw Native high school students into a process of thinking about, taking responsibility for, and acting upon these difficult issues.

TRIBAL VOTES

Another highlight of the 1988 Youth Convention was a caucus debate and plenary floor vote on two basic issues

of tribal sovereignty in Alaska: 1) the kinds of governmental powers which should be recognized in Native tribes and 2) the ways in which Native (ANCSA) lands should be owned.

These complex issues, which are very new to high schools students, were introduced in a one-hour panel discussion by Native attorneys representing a variety of viewpoints, both for and against tribal sovereignty. Following the panel, the 13 regional delegations caucused to discuss the various options presented to them. Reconvening in plenary session, the students reported the results of their caucus votes, which are detailed in the box on this page. The results show an interesting breakdown, by region, on three options for the exercise of governmental powers and five options on the status and ownership of Native lands.

STUDENT RESOLUTIONS

As in previous years, delegates to the Youth Convention introduced their own resolutions for consideration and adoption by the plenary session on the afternoon of the third day. Eight of ten submitted resolutions were adopted after floor readings - several of which were amended in debate. The adopted resolutions are as follows:

- 88-01 That Native corporations should take a stronger interest in the AFN Youth Convention;
- 88-02 That there should be mandatory sex education classes in Alaska high schools to reduce teen pregnancy;
- 88-03 That future AFN Youth Conventions be held in Anchorage and that they adhere to their agendas and to parliamentary procedure;
- 88-04 That instruction on ANCSA and 1991 be institutionalized in all Alaska schools, that future delegates to Youth Conventions be prepared on ANCSA/1991, tribal issues and parliamentary procedure, and that future Youth Conventions deal with agenda items similar to the AFN conventions;
- 88-05 That people under the age of 18 should not be required to pay taxes;
- 88-06 That the delegates express

their appreciation for the mini-grant process;

- 88-07 That the Youth Council analyze and report to the 1989 Youth Convention on the subjects of personal isolation, low self-esteem, lack of social skills, lack of caring and aware school environment, and lack of positive recognition for Native students from the schools;
- 88-08 That the Youth Council solicit input from students in all regions in planning future Youth Conventions and that draft agendas be sent to participating organizations 90 days prior to the event.

YOUTH COUNCIL ELECTIONS

At the end of each Youth Convention, the students elect, by their regional caucuses, a 13-member Youth Council. The Council serves from October to October. Elected to serve for 1988-89 are: AHTNA, Angela Jackson, Glennallen; ALEUT, Jessica Rukovichnikoff, Mt. Edgecumbe; ARCTIC SLOPE, Loyla Okpik, Barrow; BERING STRAITS, Shannon Johnson, Unalakleet; BRISTOL BAY, Bridget Groat, Naknek; CALISTA, Jolen John, Toksook Bay; CHUGACH, Kathryn Katelnikoff, Mt. Edgecumbe; COOK INLET, Darrel Suzuki, Mt. Edgecumbe; DOYON, Carla Vent, Huslia; KONIAG, Robert Chernikoff, Mt. Edgecumbe; NANA, Verne' Seum, Kiana; SEALASKA, Debra Lekanof, Mt. Edgecumbe; and AT-LARGE, Carol Beckett, Anchorage.

AFN extends its sincere congratulations to these 13 young people and their alternates who represent the best of our future leadership and whose peers have chosen them to speak on behalf of Native young people all across Alaska.

NEXT TIME

In 1989, the AFN Youth Convention will return to Anchorage. The Youth Council and staff will work to design an effective agenda and topics of priority interest to Native youth. Our attendance goal is to top the 400 mark and we look forward to representation from every region and every school district in the state.