

ANHB Honored on 20th Anniversary

Note: The following remarks were made by President Janie Leask at the 22nd annual convention in honor of the ANHB's 20th anniversary.

This year, 1988, marks the 20th anniversary of the Alaska Native Health Board. It is our purpose here to recognize the dedicated service the Alaska Native Health Board has given to Alaska's Native people and to underscore their considerable achievements during the past 20 years.

The Alaska Native Health Board has been for many years the health arm of the Alaska Federation of Natives. While they are a separate corporate entity, we have worked successfully and closely together. The ANHB has acted as a statewide resource center for health promotion and advocacy and are as well-known to state and federal officials and lawmakers as they are in our communities. Their strong leadership has focused the attention of all of us upon the pressing health problems of our times.

Here are but a few of the ANHB's accomplishments:

The ANHB lead the fight to wipe out the terrible disease of Hepatitis B, a disease which threatened all Alaska Native peoples. The eradication of Hepatitis B is one of the modern

miracles in the advance of medicine. The ANHB, on its own, and in the vacuum of state inaction, began a statewide program to begin to deal with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS). FAS is the damage done to unborn babies when the mother drinks alcohol - it appears as underweight babies, often with physical disfigurement, often mentally retarded. FAS still hangs dangerous with us with Alaska Natives having the highest rates in the country. But the ANHB's actions have at last stirred state government of action with a prevention program of their own.

The ANHB brought to a standstill efforts by the federal government to impose a blood quantum requirement on people seeking Indian Health Services. The ANHB was also instrumental in delaying the government's most recent attempt to base eligibility for health services upon tribal enrollment. The ANHB, through its own efforts, brought about an amendment to the Federal Tort Claims Act, which freed approximately \$2.5 million for use in Native health services. Before the amendment, those funds had been required to pay for costly malpractice insurance for health aides and all other health workers employed by tribal 638 contractors in Alaska. ANHB efforts with the help of AFN and other tribal groups resulted in passage

of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act Amendments of 1988, which were recently signed into law by the President. The amended law more clearly states the federal government's continuing obligation to the principle of self determination for all Native American people. This year the ANHB, again providing the spirit and the leadership, was successful in more than doubling the Federal Government funding for the troubled Community Health Aide Program. This struggle has only just begun - it is the ANHB's intention to secure the total \$22 million additional dollars that are needed to resurrect the troubled program.

Following the 1964 Earthquake, the Alaska Native Medical Center in Anchorage, an aging and poorly functioning building, was declared to be unfit for service and in desperate need of replacement. When it became evident that the federal government had lost interest in replacement, the ANHB, in 1985, picked up the challenge. This Native organization, with audacity and confidence, developed a technically correct, unsolicited proposal to plan and build a replacement hospital. The federal officials were shocked into action by this display of nerve and competence. They have been making good progress ever since, with the ANHB right there to see

that the job is done right. Within two months, a contract for design will have been let for a facility of which Alaska's Natives may be justly proud.

About alcohol abuse: the ANHB has been at the forefront in the battle against this terrible affliction that has touched so many of us. For many years now, the ANHB has advocated a community development approach to this problem. Long before anything had been heard about the dramatic success of Alkali Lake, the ANHB had been recommending that the healing must begin at the community level and that we would not expect the services of the state or the federal government to save us from ourselves. And then we began to hear about Alakali Lake through the movie, *The Honor of All*, and we are beginning to hear of communities in Alaska who are also experiencing similar "healing". We now can see that the Alaska Native Health Board had real insight into the possibility that communities could become more healthy through their own efforts.

As I said earlier, these represent but a small portion of the Alaska Native Health Board's success over the years. The Alaska Federation of Natives takes great pleasure in showing its appreciation for the ANHB and its solid achievements over the years.