

# Voices heard at village meetings



Winnie Billy recalls the worry for her children's future which prevented her from sleeping the night before. Billy wonders what their lives will be like with the changes brought upon the land by ANCSA.

"I think these meetings should be used to tell me your views. Some of you may say tribal governments should be strengthened; some of you may say the corporations should be strengthened. Some may say the tribal governments should hold the land, some will say the corporations should hold the land."—Thomas Berger, speaking in Tununak.

"We heard a lot of money was going to come to the village, a million dollars. To this date, my people back home never see a cent in their hands."—Michael Hunt, Kotlick.

"I kind of questioned the act. How can a man be living in his home and have a stranger come in his house and say to him that just one corner was his?"—John Kailukiak, Tununak.

"We didn't know anything of corporations; we didn't own land. We didn't know how to keep records of property. But Congress passed the law and said, 'Here is your land, here is your money . . . this is how long it is going to take!' Twenty years is not long enough . . ."—Phillip Immonak, Emmonak.

"The Native Claims Settlement Act does not really mean anything to our people. The U.S. should acknowledge Russia never owned Alaska. It's a piece of paper that could be burned."—Sam George, Akiachak.

"The meaning of this last dance is those ducks, when they swim they're just diving down into the water. When they come up, they shake off the water."—Mike Angaiak, Sr., after performing a traditional dance for Tom and Beverly Berger during their last night in Tununak.

"It would be very nice if we all followed how things are done by the federal, not the state. We could form IRA governments. If we all agreed to have one form of government, we would live in a more peaceful way."—Carl Flynn, Tununak.

"I would like to explain that Native law should be respected. Sometimes Gussuck puts seal on a paper; that means respectful. Our ancestors soaked the land with their blood, even their bones, so we could make our own law."—Paul John, Tooksook Bay.

"I feel that our generation is a lot different from our parents and forefathers. . . . Our parents and forefathers lived off the land, where we

right now depend on the modern."—Darlene Westlock junior at Emmonak High School.

"Hunger knows no law. I have taught my children to hunt. I told them 'if you're ever hungry, you forget whiteman's law! You feed yourself!'" Mike Joe of St. Marys, who did not testify, during a cigarette break at the Tununak meeting.

"After their land, everything was taken away. The buffalo was gone. They were put in what to me is concentration camps, but they were called something else . . . . When I think of that, I feel that we the Eskimo, we were kind of lucky I think."—Axel Johnson of Emmonak, comparing ANCSA to Lower 48 reservations.

"Just recently, all of a sudden, I heard about 1991 and its issues. Why did not someone consult us before doing this 1991? . . . . Our ancestors, our Elders, died happy. Right now, if I had to die I would be full of worries for my children's future. If I die now, maybe I would have to pay for the land I would be buried in, too!" Rose Charlie, Tununak.

"Without our knowledge, the land has been sold for a few million dollars . . . . What good will that do? Because of that money, we are in danger of losing our land and future for our children . . . . I seen people in the Regional Corporation talking about money. They seemed to be happy. I don't go for that. I don't receive a penny of that money. I would like to know who accepted that money when it was offered without talking to me first!"—Mathias Johnson, Tununak.

"There were some people in Alaska at that time who said Alaska Natives shouldn't receive anything. Zero. No land, no money. That's what happened, and we're here to consider how it has worked out for you, and to face these 1991 issues."—Thomas Berger.

"Why go to the hearing? The land, the oil, that's what you guys are after, isn't it? You want to take over everything. I was in San Francisco, and everything was pavement. You couldn't even touch the ground. That's what you want. Me, I want the land to stay like it is, no changes." A young man about 30 years old, hanging out in the Que Ball Pool Hall.

"He said land is to be shared by everyone. Land is like the air that is breathed by everyone, land is like the sun that shines down on everyone, land is like the rain that falls on everyone," Andrew Kelley of Emmonak, explaining difficulties encountered in convincing an Elder to file for a 160-acre Native Allotment before the final deadline passed in 1971.

"Dear Elders, you are special because you teach us to dance, drum and hunt. You watch seals. You teach us Eskimo words. Love; Helen, Marcia, Phyllis, Phillip, Leonard Jr., Roxanne, Eric, Phillip K., Charles, Frank, Philip Jr., Teddy." Poster displayed at the Emmonak hearings, from the first grade.

"I did learn quite a bit myself. I had a heck of a time in earlier days. I can't even know what they're talking about when they say Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. This was the first time we've been able to talk in our own language. I think a lot of people learned from it." Peter Moore of Emmonak, commenting on the hearings.

"It seems to me my people have gone from the stone age right into the twentieth century. In less than 100 years, they have had to go through drugs, alcohol, and city governments. Sometimes I don't know how they can take it. You people had the benefit of centuries, our people the matter of a few years."—Xavier Joseph, Alakanuk.

"We need to hold on to the lifestyle of our ancestors, because through them, we are here."—Thomas Jumbo, IRA president, Nightmute.

"There were no documents written down because we don't write. It was in the Elders' heads. The Elders lead us always from wrong to right. We need to have and hold our lifestyle from our ancestors."



A Tununak dog frolics by a frozen boat waiting for spring.