



## *Native commission offers hope*

**by Julie Kitka**

*President, Alaska Federation of Natives*

Congress passed House Resolution 498 Aug. 4, creating the Joint Federal-State Commission on Policies and Programs Affecting Alaska Natives.

The legislation now goes to the White House and President George Bush for signature.

Our hopes for the success of this commission rest upon three major factors:

- The involvement of the Native people in all aspects of the commission's work — right from the beginning.
- The continued interest of the Congress in the well-being of Native people — and their willingness to make fundamental changes in federal policy if deemed necessary.
- The cooperation of the state of Alaska.

As we stated in the AFN report: "Government and Alaska Natives need to forge a new partnership while there is still time to do so. But in seeking innovative solutions to problems of social and economic changes, the new partnership must acknowledge and respect the fact that Alaska Natives are a people of the land and that maintaining traditional relationships to land they have historically used and occupied is essential to the physical, emotional and cultural well-being of all Alaska Natives."

"The stakes are high and the challenges immense. But if Alaska Natives and the federal and state governments jointly commit themselves to developing and implementing new policies to address today's problems, progress is possible."

We still believe this is true. This commission legislation is just an opportunity. It will be up to us whether it will be a tool to help our people.

AFN would like to offer a special thanks to public officials who recognized the serious situation facing Alaska Natives and offered their help: Sens. Ted Stevens, Frank Murkowski, Daniel Inouye and John McCain; Congressmen Don Young, Morris Udall, George Miller; Gov. Steve Cowper and members of his administration and the leadership of the Alaska Legislature.

Special recognition should also go to the dedicated congressional staff who spent many hours working on this legislation.