

# WHY HENSLEY'S RESIGNATION

## AFN, Inc.'s Arrears Largely Paid Off During His Presidency

By THOMAS RICHARDS, JR.

ANCHORAGE — During an interview with the Tundra Times on Monday, Alaska Federation of Natives president Willie Hensley discussed his reasons for resigning the presidency of the statewide organization and his hopes for the future of the Native federation.

Hensley, an Alaska State Senator from Kotzebue, said he accepted the presidency over one year ago because of his concern about the financial condition of the AFN and because he recognized the need

for a continued statewide voice for Native People.

At the beginning of his administration, the AFN was faced with a number of problems, including a debt of over 700 thousand dollars and the withdrawal of two regional Native organizations from the federation.

The financial burden of the AFN has been largely relieved during the past year.

"We have paid over 600 thousand dollars and our current financial obligations now stand at less than 100 thousand. I don't have much doubt that we can get a decent budget for the coming year from each of the ten, if not more, participating regions," Hensley noted.

In spite of great limitations, the AFN has been able to continue lobbying its position effectively in such priority areas as federal regulations guiding the implementation of the Native claims settlement and advance payments to regional corporations from the federal treasury.

Limitations to the effectiveness of the AFN operation,

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Hensley said, stem from a staff shortage and the reluctance of many regional Native groups to guide policy and assist with lobbying efforts.

While the federation employs 35 people on its current staff, most of these administer and operate service programs contracted to the organization for Native health, higher education, and the Johnson-O'Malley fund.

These contracts total over four million dollars and provide some revenue for the federation after payment of expenses for the programs. Although the organization was budgeted for 230 thousand dollars during the past year, Hensley said, "We have not fed the staff and the manpower to cover all bases."

With the increased amount of federal and state agencies, boards, and commissions giving attention to Native affairs, and the additional impact of impending pipeline construction and Native claims implementation, the AFN has been greatly taxed to present Native opinion on issues effecting the entire state.

Hensley said that the areas which will require maximum effort from the organization during the immediate future will be to ensure significant Native employment in pipeline construction and to protect subsistence rights for Natives living along the pipeline right of way.

He described figures mentioned by Alyeska Pipeline for Native employment as "simply not believable" and stated that the position of the AFN will call for "a minimum of at least four thousand Natives working on the pipeline."

The federation leader summed up his feelings about the pipeline in stating, "No one is aware of the full impact of the pipeline. It is going to be like a major invasion of the state."

Hensley predicted that the AFN will continue to regain much of the authority and unity it had prior to settlement of the Native claims and that Native people desire a stronger and more unified voice for Native affairs on a statewide level.

"The regional leadership has to keep in mind that any Native impact means some degree of

unity."

He added that eight of the twelve regional Alaska Native groups have already agreed to contribute to the new budget and that support from other regions would be forthcoming.

Hensley's resignation from the AFN presidency is expected to become effective during the first week of December. It is not yet clear who his replacement will be and speculation about his successor is likely to become intensified up until the beginning of the annual convention of the AFN in Anchorage on December 16.

"We need some one who will be on top of the issues and who will be able to exercise substantial leadership," Hensley said.

He observed that he was leaving office to allow the regional membership to decide what type of leadership they desire and to allow the AFN to work out new organizational and staffing arrangements.

One of the proposals which will be considered by the federation is to reorganize away from strict regional representation and to provide for individual Native membership, a situation similar to that under which the federation was organized in 1966.

There has been much speculation about Hensley's plans after leaving the AFN presidency. Many recent press accounts theorized that Hensley was resigning in order to put some distance between himself and Native affairs prior to making a bid for statewide office.

He denied that he felt burdened politically by his Native leadership responsibilities and said that he was stepping down merely to allow the membership to decide the future of the AFN.

"It has been a whole lot of fun," he noted.

Hensley said that he remains undecided about his future political plans, but will not completely discount reports that he is interested in statewide office.

As for his immediate plans Hensley said, "I am going to take a brief vacation in the sun, and then go home to Kotzebue to get some material ready for the legislative session which will begin in January."