

Edgcumbe, Trust can not be taken

To the Editor:

Mt. Edgcumbe opened its doors on Feb. 22, 1947, to provide educational opportunities to Alaska Natives and since then has become an Alaska Native institute.

In one way or another the school has touched the lives of almost every Alaska Native; either as graduates of the school attendance at the school or related to someone who has attended the school.

Throughout its history, the school, at times, has been the center of controversy or conflict; accused of being just a boarding home, graduating misfits, disrupting the Alaska Native cultures and providing a questionable quality of education to Alaska Natives.

However, the school has graduated some of the most influential Native leaders in the State and developed Native resources which helped in improving the economic conditions of villages.

Most recently, in the last few years, under the guidance and direction of Lee Demmert and the former Bureau of Indian Affairs Area Direct-

or, Clay Antioquia, the school has developed into a top-notch high school. Demmert has instilled a sense of pride and spirit amongst the students and staff. Antioquia defended the school's continued existence and treated the school as an important aspect of the overall Bureau of Indian Affairs commitment to deliver services to the Alaska Native.

The recent position the Alaska Native Leaders have taken against the closure of the school is commendable. Granted, there are philosophical differences in regard to educating, either at home or transporting students to a boarding home system, however, these differences do not justify terminating a federal trust-relationship which is providing educational opportunities for Alaska Natives.

The ultimatum of choosing either Mr. Edgcumbe or the existing BIA elementary day schools, is just a ploy to receive the authorization to terminate a part of that trust-relationship.

The BIA day schools currently operating in the Bethel

and Nome areas should continue as long as the villages want that type of educational delivery. BIA, under the direction of Bill Benton and Cal Lundy of the Bethel Agency, has been at the forefront in developing innovative, highly successful educational programs such as: the bilingual education and early childhood programs. To have to choose between Mt. Edgcumbe and these day schools is not fair.

The real issue, I believe, is not just the closing of Mt. Edgcumbe or turning over the BIA day schools to the REAA school systems but in terminating a trust-relationship between the Alaska Natives and the Federal Government. WHAT WILL BE NEXT? the Health Services and other social service programs?

Mt. Edgcumbe is an Alaska Native institute, BIA is a trust relationship with the Alaska Natives. We cannot allow either to be taken away from us.

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