

With Life Ebbing, Gray Pleads Cause

(EDITOR'S NOTE: The Tundra Times received this letter this week, from Nick Gray in the Alaska Native Service Hospital in Anchorage. Nick is seriously ill with leukemia and is not expected to recover. We are more than proud to print the words of a man so instrumental in the forming of organizations to push for improved conditions for Alaska Natives. Nick helped form the Fairbanks Native Association, was the first president of the Cook Inlet Native Association in Anchorage, and was instrumental in the formation of the Kusko-kwim Valley Native Association at Bethel recently.

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Mr. Howard Rock, Editor
Tundra Times
Fairbanks, Alaska

Dear Howard,

I am writing a letter which I hope you will see fit to print. The subject matter you will note not only crosses party lines but does give our people, Indian, Eskimo and Aleut, an opportunity for cooperation. Action by existing Associations will provide an initial backlog of experience in cooperative action.

I have been taking treatment here since February 15. Because of many contributing, confusing factors my case required a consultation with three leading internists from commercial field of medicine here to confirm last week that I have leukemia.

Had two bad seiges the past month. They notified my daughter and son for which I am grateful, since they came at once, so I had the privilege of seeing them together for the first time in 20 years.

After a rather large blood transfusion I am experiencing what is termed a "remission." This may last an indefinite time—one day, weeks or optimistically, even months. In other words, considering my age, nearly 66, no life expectancy. However, I am grateful each day for one more day of life. Life can be beautiful.

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Desperately Ill Nick Gray Pleads Cause for His People . .

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As a patient of over 5 months in the Alaska Native Service Health Center, here in Anchorage, I feel that I should discuss with you some conclusions arrived at by as near to objective observation and careful questioning as conditions permit.

First, I wish to express a resounding "Thank-You," to the operational staff for service and devotion to duty beyond the requirements as limited to people on a salary status. Time and time again I have seen these people answer to emergencies and difficult situations which continually arise in a hospital with a patient work load as continuous as this center is obliged to handle.

We are sometimes prone to overlook the fact that the critical needs in medicine and surgery of all our people, are treated here.

In performance of their work for us, I have noted with some surprise at first and gratification later, the willingness and alacrity to return in time of need, interrupting their "off time," is general from the surgical, through diagnosis to all associated departments, namely laboratory and X-ray. For all their extra effort and service I'm sure they receive no extra or special pay. Only the satisfaction of serving which is a continual encroachment on their "off time" for rest and recreation.

The doctors and surgeons are highly trained, capable, and under daily pressure of an unbelievably heavy work load. These people can and could make out much easier in the field of competitive commercial practice. But no, they persist under the aegis of P.H.S. with its manifold shortcomings and drawbacks. The only conclusion possible is the desire to treat the most number possible to recovery and health (and people who, otherwise, would not receive medical attention at all)—in a word, service.

When the health and welfare of the Alaska native was taken over ten years ago by P.H.S., the initial grant was \$16,000 with orders to arrest the T.B. wave which was rampant and was destined to wipe out completely the native population. A survey showed over 4,000 active and often virulent cases on the streets of our cities and towns and villages. No place was exempt or free from the "White Plague."

Prodigious, almost superhuman efforts were expended by the early P.H.S. servants. They arrested the decimation of our people; we were well on the way to total extinction. An unbiased survey of their record shows that these people of P.H.S., because of this devotion to duty, faced the seemingly insurmountable task of treatment and cure, without basing their individual efforts to their pay scale or status. The fact of ridiculously low appropriations indicate that the task of treatment of T.B., acute shortage of suitable housing and hospital space as well as shortages of medical supplies and surgical equipment. Only the crusaders' zeal of these dedicated people could achieve the success they have.

Today I find the same spirit among the staff of the ANS Health Center. Today, as in the past, the annual budget

is always deplorably short for the fiscal year, resulting in curtailing staff force through all departments from surgery to the dietary. Before the fiscal year is over medical supplies are exhausted (about 1/2 depleted), dietary regimens are tightened up and the pressure of the work load falls on the service staff.

Statewide and also here the accepted norm for the number of personnel to each patient is three to one. Full efficiency cannot be achieved with less. It may startle you as it did me when I learned that this hospital has always struggled along with the handicaps of only 1/2 personnel per patient. Deplorable — intolerable — it must be changed. How?

It is gratifying to observe the awakening of our people to the necessity of cooperative effort by forming associations, brotherhoods, etc., to protect our heritage; we are the rightful descendants and inheritors of our great state.

The myriad of problems which we will demand to be resolved by the State of Alaska and the U.S. Federal Government are extremely confusing and complex. But with careful selection of leaders among our people to represent each area—meeting delegates and representatives from all sections of Alaska so that we pool our efforts and then speak one voice.

Such a voice representing 50,000 natives—voters all, will impose upon our duly elected representatives in Juneau a thorough and complete survey. In Washington, the seat of the most powerful government in man's history will ponder carefully and deeply our claims. They will take note of our participation — recognizing that only cooperative action between them and us can good permanent results be realized.

We must resist and forever destroy the attitude of paternalism which governmental and state actions incur. Our hereditary claims can hardly be denied, since they extend far into the dim pages of history, far out-dating the beginnings of most currently established nations. A heritage of which we can justly be proud.

It is most gratifying to see our people awakening to the need of organizing into associations and brotherhoods, so their collective voice can be heard. The next logical step for these separate and far-flung groups is affiliation and then eventual amalgamation into a harmonious whole dedicated to achieve the most good for all.

First, our own attitudes of sectionalism must be buried with the past. The feeling of "he is an Indian"—"he is an Aleut"—"I am an Eskimo," must disappear and be re-

placed by "I am an Alaskan." Our problems are similar, but divergent because of conditions of geography and climate. Basically they are one. The opportunity is here. The time is now wherein all our people can experience a cooperative effort which directly affects our health and welfare.

I urgently suggest that all native groups, associations, and brotherhoods investigate to ascertain the conditions as I've tried to present them. When you find conditions as I have found them, and I'm sure you will—your course of action is clear.

Only through legislative action can the inertia and lethargy of bureaucratic facilities be stirred to action. Alert our representatives to existing conditions and request, nay, demand that prompt action be taken.

Deal with our representatives in Washington and insist that the Surgeon General of the United States be notified so as to correct conditions in Alaska PHS which is the result of niggardly appropriations.

In this era of colossal spending in Foreign Aid, Lend Lease and outright give away, I'd like to point out that our government spends 1/2 million daily on a health and welfare program in South Vietnam.

Amazing isn't it? I think none of us begrudge the cost of health and welfare for the Vietnamese people. The pursuance of their program in Vietnam and its cost indicate that the cost for one week's health and welfare program added to functional and operational functions of PHS in Al-

aska will give them the opportunity to raise their total service from dangerously near mediocrity to full efficiency.

We owe action in the above regard to future generations as well as to ourselves. Give the dedicated operational people of PHS the chance to carry on their vital work, without the aggravations and frustrations based on lack of funds.

Statewide cooperation of all our people to support a program of health and welfare crosses all political lines and will be the first major step in erasing "sectionalism" among us. Working together on this common problem will give us the background of experience necessary so that we can work in harmony and unity to deal with larger, more complex problems such as aboriginal rights and last, but not least, the settlement of our land claims.

During my stay here, since I couldn't get out to search, I have asked almost all of my many friends to pick up a Tundra Times for me but no one had the remotest idea where to look. The last issue was brought by Art Upicksoun, dated Feb. 25. Since there are people from every corner of Alaska here at any given time, I think you are missing a very good opportunity for acquainting them with the nature and aims of the Tundra Times by not sending free copies of each issue, possibly two copies to each of the floors. Suggest approaching the management for the privilege of installing an "honor rack" in the lobby.

I am sure a letter to the patient council would be rewarding since they handle

the Anchorage Daily Times, as well as pop and popcorn.

Hoping that the Tundra Times will grow in influence and importance in the immediate future. It is my fondest hope that your policy will always ignore party lines and do all possible to remove sectionalism from the minds of Alaskans.

Trusting that you and the Tundra Times staff are enjoying good health.

I am sincerely,

Nick C. Gray
ANS Hospital
Anchorage, Alaska