

Jacobs Asking Referendum for Vote in Bethel

In his latest letter this week, William Jacobs, executive director of the Alaska Legal Services Corporation asked Mayor Arthur L. Nicholson and the City Council of Bethel "to initiate a referendum on the next general election ballot on the proposition whether or not council meetings should regularly be conducted in both Eskimo and English."

Since Bethel council story broke into newsprint two weeks ago, there have been several exchanges of letters between the Alaska Legal Services Corporation and the Bethel City Council.

The first letter was sent to Bethel on Jan. 2 by the Legal Services and it was replied to by Mayor Arthur L. Nicholson of the Kuskokwim city on Jan. 11.

In his initial letter to Bethel, William Jacobs, executive director of the Legal Services with offices in Anchorage, charged that the council was not representative because there was approximately 90 per cent Eskimo population compared with about ten per cent Caucasian and that the city council was nearly 100 per cent White.

In his delayed reply, Mayor Nicholson said that the charges were "irresponsible allegations" and that the statistical information contained in the Legal Services' letter was

BETHEL...

(Continued from Page 1)

"wrong and distorted."

Nicholson also charged, "It does not appear that the primary purpose of this letter was intended as a recommendation to the Council, but rather for publicity."

In his latest reply, William Jacobs wrote:

"It is not the objective of this office to engage in debate in the newspapers. Our responsibility is to represent the people of Alaska who are poor, of which Bethel has its share.

"In my letter I referred to statements made to us by such people in your city. These statements were made in confidence and it is our firm policy to maintain such confidence."

Nicholson also wrote, "The members of the Bethel City Council are elected in accordance with the Alaska State statutes, as I presume they are in all incorporated sub-divisions of the State."

Jacobs replied, "No one has indicated that council elections have been held in violation of Alaska statutes, or that voter turnout has been low.

"People did say, however, that they had lost interest in council proceedings because they could not adequately follow the business of the council in English.

"Mr. Hoffman of the council, confirmed this lack of interest in his recent press interview. Since some sources attribute it to a greater interest in "shows every night and bingo every Thursday," there is an obvious difference of opinion about the case."

Edward Hoffman, Sr., a six-year member of the Bethel City Council, had told the press in Anchorage this week about the Bethel Eskimo citizens, "All they think about are the shows every night and bingo every Thursday."

Jacobs continued, "Since we are all interested in good democratic government, it is time to find a constructive solution by working together. The democratic process allows for resolution of differences where precise scientific information is not available and some of those concerned desire to remain anonymous.

"Would the council be willing," Jacobs wrote a concluding question, "to initiate a referendum on the next general election ballot on the proposition whether or not council meetings should regularly be conducted in both Eskimo and English?"