

AFN delegates seek new 1991 legislation

by A.J. McClanahan
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After nearly three full days of debate, delegates to the Alaska Federation of Natives Convention decided against pursuing 1991 legislation this year and to start over on

writing a bill to protect Native lands and corporations.

Delegates rejected the Senate version of a 1991 bill, and voted in favor of a resolution offered by Byron Mallott of Yakutat that calls for a new bill to be pursued in the next Congress.

"This resolution provides an effective vehicle to achieve legislation and balance competing interests within the Native community," said Chris McNeil of the Sealaska Corp.

Major concerns raised about the bill during the convention were that it

could have weakened tribal governments and that it called included a vote requiring Native regional corporations to vote in favor of retaining Native control.

(Continued on Page Six)



Hands swayed, feet stomped and bodies moved to the beat of drums as David Kagak of the Wainwright Dancers participated in "Quiana Alaska" Wednesday night to open the 20th convention of the Alaska Federation of Natives. Dance groups from Sitka, Nenana, Wainwright and Bethel followed the Native Heritage Dress Review in the Sullivan Arena.

photo by Norris Klesman

AFN 1991 legislation

(Continued from Page One)

Also, concerns were raised about stock for Natives born after passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971.

Willie Kasayulie of Akiachak expressed hope that the provisions contained in the resolution can be passed in Congress.

"I think we can pass a good bill," he said, adding he has no problems with it so long as the Alaska Native Coalition can be part of the process.

The Mallott resolution calls for the new legislation to provide several key points, including:

- Maximum protection possible for ANCSA lands from loss or taking so that future generations may enjoy use and ownership of those lands.

- Shareholder decisions on continued use of the corporate organizational form, maintaining Native ownership to ANCSA corporations for the longest time possible and providing for the transfer of lands to alternative institutions.

- Maintenance of existing inherent tribal rights of Alaska Native tribes.

- Fair and reasonable ratification of 1991 legislation by Alaska's Native people.

The resolution directs the AFN board to work with the Alaska Native Coalition and other affected Native organizations and institutions to

develop and seek passage in Congress of the new bill.

And it calls on the board to "exercise its best judgment in the absence of convention direction on any issue important to gaining passage of 1991 legislation including a determination that the best possible legislation under the then prevailing circumstances has been obtained and its passage is in the best interests of Alaska's Native people, except that any such legislation may not jeopardize or weaken the existing inherent tribal rights of Alaska's Native people."

McNeil said it will be important to recognize that circumstances may again force changes to the bill.

"I feel confident we'll get a bill, but it may not look like this," he said.

Morris Thompson of Fairbanks, who was elected co-chairman of AFN to replace Oliver Leavitt of Barrow, said the resolution gives AFN a definite direction for legislation, as well as strengthening village participation.

Thompson said one of his concerns about trying to get a new bill passed is that opponents to the bill in Alaska will have more time to organize. But he expressed hope that broad support in the Native community will aid passage.

Also, he said he felt confident about the fact that the bill was debated openly and objectively during the convention.



Gov. Bill Sheffield congratulates John Schaeffer of Kotzebue after Schaeffer was made a general in the National Guard photo by Norris Klesman

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Morris Thompson shown speaking during the AFN Convention was among those who discussed the controversial 1991 legislation. Delegates decided to try again next year.

photo by Norris Klesman



Rhonda Carter of the Nenana Dancers was among performers at "Quiana Alaska" last week at Anchorage's Sullivan Arena. People from all over Alaska filled the floor and many of the seats.

photo by Norris Klesman