

# Health Board meets with Bush caucus

by Dr. Ted Mala

University of Alaska, Anchorage.

The word is out: the Alaska Native Health Board is very much alive and well. This was particularly demonstrated recently at their meeting in Juneau when they stood before the Bush Caucus members and related their concerns on a number of issues that affect us all. Just what ARE these key issues? They voiced concerns about lung problems associated with the oiling of roads; domestic violence; more coordination of programs brought out to the Bush that were designed for urban areas; that a cancer registry be established; that some study be done on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome in Alaska; that the seven Alaska sites selected as program models in the suicide prevention program be extended for more time.

Other concerns were aimed at the Department of Health and Social Services and the lack of good vital statistics being collected these days; that someone needs to be coordinating rural health issues and bringing them to the attention of the concerned state and federal agencies.

Board members from the Bush questioned why the Center for Disease Control used one method of reporting for Americans in general and another one comparing that group to Alaska Natives.

Executive Director Dennis DeGross pointed out how concerned he was to learn at the last AFN Youth Conference that of the 100 youths attending, not one of them planned to remain in his or her village.

Alcoholism was cited as a "generational problem" which is being passed down from parents to children today. It was pointed out that Alaska was putting \$ 12.5 million dollars into the problem without any significant results and how we need to look for new models that will be more effective than that which we have now.

The statewide group of Native Corporation Health Directors also met with the ANHB and pointed out that some areas like North Pacific Rim is already working on a new "holistic" approach which uses both the natural and extended family in their treatment plan. The basis of the program was to reempower the village council and the family and that true change will take a long time to follow up on and to break already existing patterns of alcoholism. They have been working at this for the past 3 1/2 years and plan to continue to do so.

Dave Mather, Health Director for Tanana Chiefs, said that he had met with Rep. Adelheid Herrmann to discuss the Communi-

ty Health Aide Bill which is being considered to raise the salaries of Health Aides to provide them with a more realistic living wage, as well as to retain them longer so that the more experienced ones will not quit.

Listening to the comments were: Bush Caucus Chairman Jack Fuller (Nome); Rep. Al Adams; Sen. John Sackett; Rep. John Ringstad and Speaker Max Grussendorf (Sitka). Rep. Ad Herrmann was in a confirmation hearing and could not attend.

The ANHB supported the 8 cent cigarette excise tax as well as the bill that would do away with "Happy Hour" in bars and the "open container bill" which they felt should be made to further include unlicensed vehicles such as 3 wheelers and snow

machines making it illegal to operate a vehicle with an open alcoholic beverage container present.

Rep. Adams told the group of the \$350 million dollar loss of revenue that Alaska was experiencing and that all of us need to contact our legislators to let them know what we think is important.

I must tell you that I am really impressed with what I saw and heard of the new ANHB and their staff. Director Dennis "Denny" DeGross has brought a lot of sensitivity and experience to his position and Chairperson Carolyn Martin has supported him to make all of them into a dynamic team.

You should get to know the others: Theresa Sappier, reseat-

cher; Bonnie Gabaldon, administrative assistant; Mike Martin, Project Coordinator; Debbie Schwartz, Nurse Researcher; Marvin Bailey and Cathy Alex, Secretary. They are at 1135 W. 8th Ave., Suite 2, Anchorage, 99501. Their phone number is 276-8989.

Like other Alaska Native agencies, their goal is to upgrade the level of health care for all of us. They represent us before federal and state agencies and are our voice and can only continue to do so if all of us talk to them and let them know what we consider as our priorities. We do this by contacting the board member from our region or writing to them directly with our concerns. They are all good listeners. Try it. You won't be disappointed.