

Native Omnibus hearings start at AFN Convention

The Alaska Native Omnibus Bill is still in its early stages, but it got a lot of comment and was one of the main issues of the 30th Annual Alaska Federation of Natives Convention.

The convention officially started on Thursday, Oct. 17 but work on the Omnibus bill started on Wednesday with the first hearing on the bill at the end of the Youth and Elders Conference.

The draft bill takes up the recommendation of the Alaska Natives Commission Report, a 444-page report on the economic and social problems of Native Alaskans.

The Omnibus Bill is in its infancy with a timeline of several years before it gets to its final version.

"I want to stress this is the beginning of the legislative process," said Rep. Don Young, R-AK to the conference.

The bill is an attempt to confront those problems and how best to deal with al-

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John Abraham with the Toksook Bay Dancers performs at the Egan Center in Anchorage during the 30th annual Alaska Federation of Natives Convention.

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cohol, jobs and provide for the village youth without letting the report gather dust.

All agree that there is a lot of work to be done on the bill.

"We're making a beginning, but I think we have a lot of work to do," said Mike Williams, Chief of the village of Akiak, testifying before Alaska's congressional delegation.

The bill calls for more power to prosecute alcohol-ban crimes in the local community with the use of tribal courts, but tribal courts aren't recognized, said Williams.

Williams also said Title 2 of the bill gives too much money to the for profit corporations, saying the village corporations know best how to administer the funds "in all areas."

Other recommendations were to keep "red tape" to a minimum, expand community development quota programs and empower the villages.

Highlights of the bill are that it calls for 50 percent Native hire on any construction projects in Native communities and 20 percent Native hire on any projects done on federal land.

Congress started implementing some of the commission's recommendations by appropriating \$8 million for education; \$1 million toward enrichment programs in science and math and another \$2 million going to preschool programs.

The Omnibus bill is aimed at ending the "culture of dependence" that has plagued the Natives, said Kitka.