

Lekanof Interested In Heading DNA If Hickel Asks

Progress was made toward the solution to a difficult land problem in and around Kotzebue last weekend when officials of the Bureau of Land Management, the Northwest Alaska Native Association, and the City of Kotzebue, met just prior to the native conference in Kotzebue.

Meeting with the Kotzebue groups were Robert Krumm, BLM District Manager, Berton Silcock, and BLM townsitetrustee George Gustafson.

The land problem was created due to the fact Kotzebue is located on a peninsula and because a great deal of vacant land is held in federal withdrawals by federal agencies. In addition when Kotzebue townsitewas surveyed and the lots auctioned off all lots were disposed of to buyers.

The result is that vacant land within the townsitewas held by private ownership not always willing to sell. Often persons moving into the

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large Eskimo community from nearby villages cannot afford the price or find land to purchase.

The meeting was termed very fruitful by Willie Hensley, of Kotzebue, who indicated that additional land may be surveyed for use and possibly some land obtained from federal agencies. He indicated it was also hoped land would be held back to permit later

Flore Lekanof, chairman of the newly formed Alaska Federation of Native Associations, told the Tundra Times this week that he would be interested in heading the Department of Native Affairs under certain conditions if it was offered to him.

Lekanof was contacted by the Tundra Times after rumors reached Fairbanks that he was seriously being considered for the post by Governor Walter J. Hickel.

The department is expected to be created early in the forthcoming legislative session with the director having commissioner status. A bipartisan support is expected.

"I would be interested in taking the job if Governor Hickel would not restrict the commissioner, but would allow him to put into action the desires of the native people themselves," Lekanof said.

"I believe the person to head the new post should not be responsive to any political party necessarily, but should rather be a servant to the native people and their needs," Lekanof informed the Tundra Times. He added that he felt this would not conflict with Governor Hickel's philosophy because his very desire to create the new post seemed to indicate his interest in the area.

"The Department of Native Affairs will have to work extremely close with the native associations throughout the state," Lekanof stated.

Lekanof said he felt the new department should be based on a strong commission to give policy guidance and direction. He suggested that individual native association and the Federation of Native Associations Board should be carefully consulted as to the form and personnel of the new department.

"Under such an arrangement I could work effectively and productively with the Hickel administration," he said.

Lekanof has had wide experience throughout the State of Alaska, having lived in southeastern, southcentral, the Aleutian area, Interior, and Northwestern Alaska. He is currently ASCAP coordinator for Interior Alaska, and was recently elected chairman of the newly created Alaska Federation of Native Associations.

Lekanof was born on St. George Island in the Pribilofs, and went to school at Wrangell Institute. He graduated from Whitworth College in Spokane, Washington, and later received a master's degree in education from the University of Washington.

He has taught three years in the Anchorage school system, two years for the State, and two years for the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Northwest Alaska.

Lekanof has played a key role in creating interest in native groups to help the native people solve their own problems. He was a founding member along with the late Nick Gray of the Cook Inlet Native Association and was its first president. He is an advisor to the Alaska Native Youth Association, and was recently appointed to the National Education Advisory Board for the Bureau of Indian Affairs schools throughout the nation.