

Media message

The Alaska Federation of Natives, North Slope Borough, Alaska Human Rights Commission, U of AA and the U.S. Department of Justice sponsored a statewide Media Relations seminar on October 25, 1978. Based on Barrow's press problems, it was designed to explore and solve some of the problems existing between rural Native and urban news coverage. The seminar consensus was that the urban news media needed to devote more attention to the rural areas but that little or no funds existed for any rural coverage on a regular basis. In essence, nothing was solved, but there was a worthwhile sharing of knowledge and exchange of opinions, which is a beginning.

Still, a working solution must be sought. *Oui*, a slick men's magazine, recently published an article entitled, "Towns Without Pity," which characterized Barrow as one of the most dangerous towns in the United States. "Towns in which even Charles Bronson wouldn't dare walk alone at night," according to *Oui*. In the satirical article, Barrow vied for the honor of most dangerous town with places such as Newburgh, New York — Rock Springs, Wyoming — and Pine Ridge, South Dakota, a Sioux reservation.

Native Alaskans are not the only ones to suffer from these slurs. Boston, Massachusetts is the only city in the U.S. to have an organization aimed at ensuring that minority groups receive adequate, sensitive and accurate media coverage. This organization, known as the Boston Community Media Council, has representatives from most of the radio, television and newspapers in Boston.

Despite the existence of this council, the Boston Indian Council (BIC) is upset with the media treatment of Indian people there. An article entitled, "The Plight of the Urban Indian," was recently published in the *Real Paper*, a Boston weekly newspaper with wide circulation. It overemphasized things such as identity problems and alcoholism and excluded the views of elders, young people and women. Damaging references were made about the BIC, which has over 100 Indian employees and 20 social and education programs.

The article eventually led to two major demonstrations at the *Real Paper* offices that helped pressure them, through other news media coverage, to run the Boston Indian Council's response with a picture of the demonstration and a headline reading, "Native Americans Respond to Real People Racism."

The Boston Indian Council obtained results.

Alaska's news media needs to form an organization similar to the Boston Community Media Council to deal with media sources that distort Alaskan issues such as the Barrow incident. A media association like this could bring the news media of Alaska closer and alleviate some of the rural and urban news problems.

Such an organization should adhere to the principles
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stated by Harry Reed, an English writer (1831-1895).

He said, "To find out the true state of facts, to report them with fidelity, to apply to them strict and fixed principles of justice, humanity and law; to inform as far as possible the very conscience of nations, and to call down the judgement of the world on what is false, or base, or tyrannical, appear to be the first duties of those who write."