



Walrus

## letters

### Language

Shishmaref, Ak. 99772  
April 26, 1979

Dear Editor:

All of us are fortunate to be living here in Alaska and in America, especially where we all have the freedom to express ourselves, be it by letters, newspapers and other means of the media.

As a Inupiaq, I have been concerned about my culture and dialect and how this generation of Inupiaqs are trying to preserve all of its traditional values, customs, language, etc. I believe that we Inupiaqs should unite and make a concerted effort to preserve and record all of our traditions, customs and most importantly-our dialects. All through the ages, our peoples have survived the harsh climate and one way our ancestors passed on the knowledge of Survival was by orally passing on stories, survival knowledge and instructions, etc., and our native dialects were used as there were no written materials to go by.

In our history books, we know that certain countries first eliminated or tried to forbid any nation from speaking and writing its mother dialect in order to control the nation and that is always a part of a dominating government's or leader's strategy to completely control or take over a minority nation or groups of people. As Inupiaqs, we all should strive to preserve our languages and teach our young people to speak and write our dialects so that they will not go to a library and check out a "How To" book in speaking a language.

I ask that whoever reads this letter to be aware and give support to any programs, people, etc., in preserving, teaching, writing and recording our native dialects here in Alaska.

Sincerely,  
Albert A. Ningeulook

## letters

### Rural schools

Aleutian/Pribilof  
Islands Asso., Inc.

Dear Mr. Smith:

Your letter and petition arrived at my home address last month and I have given them a great deal of thought. I am responding from several points of view: 1) as a parent of several children who were educated in a small (under 100 students) rural Alaskan high school; 2) as one who has been involved in the field of Alaskan education since 1965: in the day to day operation of that same small Alaskan high school (which under your plan would apparently no longer be permitted to exist), as a member of the State Operated School Board which became the Board of the Unorganized Borough School District during the final year of the State Operated School System, and as a Regional Coordinator for the State Department of Education in the implementation of Senate Bill 35 (decentralization of state operated schools); and 3) as education Director of a non-profit Native corporation serving the small and widely scattered population of the most inaccessible region of our state, the Aleutian/Pribilof Islands. From all of these viewpoints I feel qualified to offer my comments.

Unlike many of your critics, I consider your crusade to be a sincere and well-intentioned, although misdirected effort to cut down on state spending rather than statement of bias or prejudice. I agree with you that "there has to be a better way!" However, your proposal does not present a better way.

The right of rural Alaskan young people to be educated in their own villages is a hard won right for which countless people labored, sacrificed and agonized for many years. Parents in urban situations cannot fully appreciate the family disruption, fragmentation and anguish suffered by rural parents

## letters

and their children resulting from the uprooting of the young people from the home environment, usually at ages when they most need a strong cohesive supportive family unit. There are few issues as emotionally charged as that of community schools. Here in Anchorage parents throw tantrums and bring law suits over threatened school closures which may mean that their children will attend a school a few blocks farther away from their homes; rural families have endured enforced separations for all too many years. I have been in small villages of interior Alaska the day the children left, herded by the BIA's pied piper aboard planes that removed them from their families and their communities for eight or nine months at a time. It was the saddest day of the year in those villages. Until the landmark decision of the Hootch case, no one had any choice in the matter.

Of course there are inherent weaknesses in the present system, tremendous problems faced by such small high schools. There will always be problems. There will also always be problems with large high schools, and with any and every enterprise involving people and dollars. It is too soon to form any conclusions about the effectiveness, success or failure of these schools. Educational analysts and accountants are engaged in this sort of exercise. Those of us who work with the young people who have been and are being so arbitrarily shifted, herded, moved, disrupted, see it from a broader perspective. Basically we believe that the cost in damage to human lives has been far too high, a cost against which the state's expenditures of dollars for village schools stacks up like a tiny drop in a huge bucket. Some things are beyond the measurement of the dollar sign.

Under law the state makes education of its young people compulsory; the state should therefore be prepared to bear the necessary costs. What better investment of state funds than

(See LETTERS Page Twelve)

# Letters

(Continued from Page Two)

in the education of the children who are going to be running the show sooner than we thins?

Of course there must be better ways -- whatever they might be -- and improvements are being devised constantly. But your plan is *not* a better way. It is a regression to a situation that was unjust, inequitable, inhumane, destructive, and far too costly in human terms.

Sincerely yours,  
Carol A. Phillips