

# Governor not keeping his promises

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by Paul Swetzof

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Governor Knowles, who won his election appealing to, and getting, the Alaska Native vote, has sold us down the river. The latest and last straw was his decision to sign legislation providing one million dollars, half for his office and half for the legislature, to fight the Venetie Indian Country decision. Let's be realistic and honest by simply recognizing that Governor Knowles and the state legislature have declared war on Native people and our governments.

Governor Knowles, could have, at a minimum, vetoed the half million dollars to the legislature appropriated to itself to fight the Venetie decision. The Alaska legislature has no standing to participate in the Venetie

appeal. The only possible use they could have for this much money would be to lobby against Indian Country and other Native issues in the public arena.

Additionally, it is questionable that the Governor needs a half a million dollars to simply ask the U.S. Supreme Court to accept the states appeal of Venetie. In the likely event the Supreme Court refuses to hear the state's appeal, I suspect the Governor plans to use his share of this money to aggressively lobby Congress to partially terminate Alaska Native tribal governments by legislatively reversing the Venetie decision.

A review of a few of the other actions and behavior exhibited by the Gover-

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nor towards Native issues is appropriate. The Governor, who believes in a rural subsistence preference, is understandably committed to regaining state control over Alaska's fish and game resources.

The trouble is he seems willing to diminish Native rights in the process. The Governor seems to have no problem seeking amendments to Title 8 of ANILCA which would make it more difficult to enforce even the rural preference and, in the process, diminish the protections which ANILCA provides Native people because of its status as Indian legislation. What little protection we have to subsist is based on ANILCA because, as Indian legislation, it legally recognized that the United States has a trust responsibility to protect our hunting and fishing rights.

The Governor, both before and after his election, stated his administration would have no problem recognizing our tribal governments and he vowed to set up a commission to study the question of recognition and report back on ways in which state agencies could develop cooperative relationships with the tribes.

The Governor, to his credit, dropped a portion of the state's lawsuit against the feds challenging tribal recognition; however, it was obvious that this was a case which could not be won. The Governor has never established a Commission to determine a process for relating to tribes. He created a task force of attorneys and one or two token Natives which did nothing.

The most basic right is the right to protect and raise our children in culturally appropriate ways. This basic tenant is addressed in the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). Even in this area, the Governor continues to allow the state to challenge tribal ICWA intervention because it shows a level of tribal jurisdiction. The Governor's actions in this area show he continues to subscribe to the long-standing belief by the State of Alaska that our tribal governments are social clubs whose only function should be to obtain federal money to provide its members with programs and services unrelated to real questions of jurisdiction and that all questions of governance, including issues related to

our children, should be vested with the state.

The Governor did a very good job of placing influential Alaska Natives in positions of authority, such as agency commissioners. It has done little to provide permanent state jobs to Natives. It's an understatement to say that Alaska Natives have always been under-represented in classified positions in State government. Even those influential Natives who are commissioners, etc., work at the pleasure of the Governor and will be gone when the Governor leaves office. There continues to be no measurable will on the part of the state to hire Alaska Natives. If the Governor has been doing anything to correct this problem, it must be a secret.

Two years in a row Governor Knowles has come before the AFN convention to state that the Alaska Natives Commission Report will be the road map for determining how his administration relates to the Native community. The central themes and foundation of that report is recognition of our tribal governments by the United States and the confirmation that we occupy Indian Country because this will provide the tools for our villages to develop and implement our own solutions to the economic, cultural, social and educational ills which afflict many of our respective communities.

The Governor continues to completely ignore the Commission's findings and has chosen instead to present the report, both in Washington and Alaska, as an advocate of economic development for the purposes of resource development (primarily oil development) in Alaska. In summary, the Governor has tried to fashion the Natives Commission Report to suit his agenda rather than take the report for what it is, in its entirety, to benefit our respective peoples as it was meant to do.

Governor Knowles, speaking before the AFN Board in February, was asked a number of direct questions about the Indian country issue and tribal government relations with the state. He repeatedly avoided answering the questions directly and instead chose to continuously divert the issue to a discussion of his support for decent water and sewer development

in the villages. Water and sewer is important and we all support his support of additional funding for these projects, however, that is not what he was being asked about. The Governor needs to come face to face with our concerns and be up-front about responding to these issues.

I am a Democrat, and, on a personal level, I can't help but like Tony Knowles. However, if the Governor continues on this course I will not be able to again work for his re-election or even vote for him. If Governor Knowles wants our vote the next time around he will have to reverse course and earn our votes. It

won't be enough to talk a good line or be sociable.

There is an old saying that the world is paved with good intentions. Good intentions won't cut it, Governor. We need good action.

There is certainly no explanation for his decision not to line item veto the legislatures portion of the anti-Native war chest unless, contrary to the Governor's pre-election posturing, he philosophically opposes our governments and cultures. If this is his philosophical bent then he should simply be honest and say so rather than pretend to be all things to all people and try to pacify everyone.