

Letters to the Editor

Nulato, Alaska
October 20, 1969

Dear Friend: Howard Rock,
"The Editor."

Well, I just want to let you know that I came home here to Nulato in July after working for Eielson Air Force Base. There is something wrong somewhere. I talked with several different representatives and someone at different office where some high Indians in Office, but no one seems to do, or say anything. I think they're scared or afraid of their jobs or something.

Now I worked for the United States Air Force for 12 years off and on. I worked at 12 different bases in Alaska, Elmendorf, Murphy Dome, Eielson, King Salmon, Unalakleet, Fire Island, Galena, Campion, Barter Island, Cape Newwenham, Ladd Field, and two Nike sites.

I'm qualified, skilled man but don't forget I'm an Indian. G.I.'s and officers jealous of me Indian man drawing 6,7 dollars an hour, too much for them. I tried every way I know to hold my job, but one man at Eielson Air Force Base threw a "Monkey Wrench" in there. That's how I lost my job for permanent. The same man goes to Communion every Sunday, a Catholic, like myself.

How could a man go to heaven? "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." That's one of the Commandments.

Well, Mr. Rock, I don't need no job now, I'm 62½ years old, but I don't like this to happen to my young people. It's discrimination. I know enough to get a job anywhere or any place I want. But the tax was getting too much for me. I know the tax in Fairbanks was too much. I know some people or business, going out of business in Fairbanks on account of tax.

I myself worked Saturday and Sunday, ten hours a day. I earned \$86, that's time and a half. Tax got \$46—I got \$40. That was too much for me. How could an Indian like Fred Stickman from Nulato give one half of his wages for tax? What's tax especially when you own the land. I like to know.

Problem corner: I came home July. The first thing I noticed was the sidewalk in the village. I couldn't walk on the sidewalk because it was rotten. I walked on the side and I walked in mud puddles. I don't know how much it will cost for concrete walks, but when I get my land, that's the first thing I'm going to do—cement walks before I drink my part in land and cold storage, well, and move to the new site two miles from here.

The reason I'm writing this letter is, they are making lot of excuses before they buy our land. These people they're smart but they can't win. They're worrying about our money before we get it. White people are jealous because they can't get in on it.

After we sell our land, we'll sue the Russians for selling our land, and all the back pay.

From your friend,
Fred Stickman, Sr.

Kongiganak, Alaska
October 20, 1969

Mr. Howard Rock, Editor
Tundra Times
Box 1287
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701

Dear Mr. Rock:

I am very much disappointed in your editorial of October 10,

I have been a subscriber to Tundra Times since it was first published and have in the past been impressed with the quality of your journalism and editorial writing.

I must, however, question the accuracy and thinking in your recent editorial about the state taking over rural schools. If your criticism of state schools had been aimed at the condition and quality of school buildings and teachers' quarters, I would agree that by and large the BIA schools have better physical plants.

But when you attack the quality of education in the classroom, I must protest. You do not have enough facts or the ability to compare the quality of teaching in state and BIA schools.

First of all your statement that the state pays its teachers less than the BIA is in error. This may have been true in the past but it is no longer true. If you investigate this, you will find that state teachers receive higher salaries than BIA teachers. However, I do not believe you can judge the quality of teaching on the basis of pay. Good salary schedules attract good teachers and poor teachers alike. Maintaining attractive salary schedules for teachers is important in keeping teachers, and the state must do this. State teachers are in a better position than BIA teachers to work on improving their own salary schedule.

It has been found that it is difficult to judge quality teaching. One way educators have used in the past is to reward teachers on the basis of their educational level. If we use this criteria in recognizing teaching ability of state teachers, a survey made last year showed that there was a greater percentage of state rural teachers with masters degrees and added educational hours than among Anchorage teachers, the highest paid in the state. I do not have the figures on educational level of BIA teachers, but I think you may find some of those unqualified wives you mentioned teaching in BIA schools rather than state schools.

There is one very definite factor we can use in determining the quality of education in the classroom. That is pupil-teacher ratio. Here there is no doubt that state schools are in a position to do a better job at teaching. The size in state schools is considerably less than in BIA schools. For comparison, in one state school four teachers have 57 pupils. In a neighboring BIA school two teachers have 44 pupils. You figure out which children are getting more individual instruction. I understand that last year in one BIA school the enrollment was close to a hundred for two teachers. The best teacher in the world couldn't do quality teaching in that situation.

I would like to see Tundra Times publish a list of schools showing number of pupils and teachers for each school. You can read this information in print in the state school directory

for state schools. The BIA does not choose to print its enrollment figures. I understand when they cut the budget this year they increased pupil teacher ratio by dropping teachers in some schools.

Not for one minute would I discredit the ability of BIA teachers. I know many and they are doing the best job they can even in crowded classrooms. But you convince me that their teaching is better than the teaching in state schools, not with the present pupil teacher ratio. This letter is not written to claim state teachers are better than BIA teachers. It is written only to point out that your editorial was most unfair to state schools since you did not have enough information.

One thing in your editorial I might agree with is perhaps the process of state take-over might be more smooth. I believe that villages objecting to take-over might be influenced by the local BIA teacher who wants to keep his job. However, the state will hire qualified BIA teachers who wish to remain in the village. Perhaps the reluctance for state take-over is due to a lack of knowledge about the state system, and this might be partly the fault of the state. I doubt if you will find many villages having state schools which would prefer BIA schools.

Another point which I must question is political influence being more negative at the state level. Look at the facts. More pressure has been put on the BIA since statehood. This is why BIA education has improved. Ten years ago only a few native students went to high school. Now most of them go. All who want to can go. Pressure from high school education came from state legislators. The boarding home program to offset the BIA lack of high school facilities was started by the state. The state has begun regional high schools and small rural high schools. The BIA has not added to its high school facilities—just kept sending our Alaskan youth out of the state. The wheels of federal government indeed turn more slowly than state government.

It is my belief and that of many well informed educators that when the state has taken over BIA schools, Alaska will have a much better school system which is operated closer to home. The village people will have a larger say in educational policies. There will be a state board for rural schools. The present director of rural schools in Alaska, Merle Armstong, is a conscientious administrator concerned about the best education possible for all pupils in rural Alaska. He and his staff are working continually to improve state schools.

It is unfair to say that rural schools will get the dregs while Anchorage and Fairbanks gets the cream in a state run school system. Rural schools are not now

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getting the dregs and will not in the future as long as newspapers like the Tundra Times are in print. I challenge anyone to visit a classroom in Anchorage or Fairbanks and compare what is happening to one in rural schools. You will find those city schools have nothing on rural schools when it comes to materials, equipment, teachers and pupils. True some of the buildings might not be as good as BIA buildings.

But that is where the Tundra Times must use its voice. Insist that legislators appropriate more money for upgrading state school facilities. Use some of that oil money on schools. There is no better investment than in education. The State Department of Education is already doing a great job of improving instruction. They need the help of the people of Alaska in improving school facilities. When this is done Alaska rural schools will be among the best in the nation.

With no apologies,
Julia Ede, State Teacher