

Schools may lose \$3.3 million

By LONE E. JANSON

Almost half the \$7 million in federal funds provided for Native education in Alaska could be lost under proposed funding changes now being considered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).

Hearings on new rules and regulations governing the distribution of Johnson O'Malley (JOM) funds for Alaska will be held Thursday, March 29 at the Anchorage International Inn, beginning at 8:30 a.m.

They coincide with the annual conference on JOM contractors from all over Alaska, and are open to the public.

Alaska educators and Native leaders are being urged to comment on the proposed changes which could cost the State up to \$3.3 million. Currently, Alaska receives about \$7 million of a national appropriation of \$28 million.

Senator Ted Stevens urged Alaskans affected by the program to testify at the hearings or to submit written comments on the proposed changes by May 1.

The current formula is based on eligible students, of which Alaska has 24,500 and on a weighting factor based on the per student cost of public education in the state.

Bill Peratrovich, Alaska's member on the task force holding the hearings, calls Johnson O'Malley "the heart of the Self-Determination Act." Although JOM has been around since 1935, that Act provided the new thrust and much of the funding for rural Native education in Alaska. Up to 80 per cent of the BIA's budget goes for education. This year BIA is re-writing the rules and regulations for distribution of JOM money, and Alaska has a huge stake in the outcome. Alaska is the largest recipient of JOM money in the nation, receiving up to \$7 million annually.

Six different formulas have
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been proposed as new rules for distribution of JOM funds. Comments will be heard on any and all of them. The formula finally chosen will be voted on by all the Indian tribes in the United States. In Alaska, every village recognized under the Native Claims Settlement Act is considered a tribe.

BIA's efforts to come up with a viable formula for nationwide JOM funding resulted from the work of a study group created by the 95th Congress to look into the quality of Indian education in the United States. Subsequently, Public Law 95-561 was passed, dealing with changes to be made in Indian education.