

# Commentary

## Will Knowles keep self-governance pledge?

by Paul Swetzof

Governor Tony Knowles, in his speech to the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) convention, stated that the Alaska Natives Commission Report would be the "road map" for the way his administration approaches Native issues. The commission report stated the Federal and state governments should recognize Alaska's tribal governments and treat them in the same manner as outside tribes are treated.

The federal government issued a long-awaited list of Alaska's tribes in 1993 and updated this list in 1995. The list clarified, once and for all, that our tribal governments are tribes in the same governmental sense as is afforded outside tribes.

When Governor Knowles was running for election, he repeatedly stated that his administration would recognize all of those tribes

which were recognized by the federal government. He stated he was not afraid of Native sovereignty and would work to establish a government relationship between state agencies and the recognized tribes.

On October 20, 1995, the day after he made his speech to the AFN convention, his administration filed a Motion for Reconsideration in the federal District Court challenging the federal government's right to recognize tribal government by placing them on the list of federally recognized tribes. The motion states, in essence, that the BIA list of recognized tribes must be declared illegal and each tribe seeking recognition should go through the lengthy and expensive process of petitioning the federal government for recognition and, when challenged, subsequently be required to prove its governmental status in court. If the state's mo-

tion were to be upheld, and I don't think it will, it would take a minimum of fifty years for all of Alaska's tribes to seek and obtain recognition.

A big question is Governor Knowles' willingness to make good on his promises, the latest being to use the Natives Commission Report as his administration's road map in dealing with Native issues. His promises to us are what caused Native people to vote in large numbers and overwhelmingly support Governor Tony's election.

The state's Motion for Reconsideration was filed by Rebecca Snow, an Assistant Attorney General for the state in Fairbanks. She filed the motion on behalf of Attorney General Bruce Botelho. Snow, who has been with the Attorney General's office for about 17 years, is a long time foe of tribal governments and has put her philosophy to use working for the

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state.

What's going on? Is Rebecca Snow following state policy or is she a renegade state attorney? Did the Attorney General, Bruce Botelho, (who fought us when he was Wally Hickel's Attorney General), give Ms. Snow the authority to file the motion in question on his behalf? Was Governor Knowles involved in the decision to file this motion? Did the Governor give Mr. Botelho the go ahead to challenge tribal recognition or is the Attorney General a renegade state employee who is ignoring state policy in pursuit of his own philosophical goals?

I call on Governor Knowles to immediately withdraw this most basic challenge to Native people

and our governments. If Rebecca Snow has defied the Governor's major policies concerning Native people and put the state on record as opposing tribal recognition, then I call on him to fire her for this despicable act of defiance. The same goes for the Attorney General. Ms. Snow is an exempt employee who works at the pleasure of the Attorney General. Mr. Botelho is an exempt employee who works at the pleasure of the Governor. If the Governor has reversed his administration's Native policies then he should say so and not continue to go before Native forums misrepresenting his administration's policy positions.

Although I think he has a long way to go on Native issues, I've always liked Tony Knowles and

supported, in writing, his candidacy for Governor. I would like to believe him when he states his support of issues important to us. My gut reaction to this matter is that Rebecca Snow, acting on no one's authority but her own, de-

cided that state policy should match her philosophy and subsequently filed this motion challenging the most basic of Native rights. If this is the case (and I hope it is), the Governor needs to demonstrate his promised and long

overdue Executive Order recognizing the tribes on the BIA's list, and clearly detail, in writing, his administrations policies regarding tribal recognition and other important Native concerns.