

Forms of Governments Should be School Subjects

(NOTE: The following address by Eben Hopson, executive director of the Alaska Federation of Natives, was read by Juanita Corwin, administrative assistant to Eben Hopson, to Second Indian Education Conference held in Minneapolis, Minn. on August 26-28.)

By EBEN HOPSON

In keeping with the theme of new ideas on Indian education I will endeavor to express my views based on my experience and knowledge of the educational needs of our people today.

Our needs are varied and numerous in the field of education. Some of these needs are the direct results of errors made in the past. Since we are all aware of the errors made relative to the education of the Natives of Alaska and the American Indians across the nation, I will not dwell on them except to express my concern that the improvements vital to the education of not only the Native of

Alaska but Indian Americans of the lower 48 are much too slow in coming for the rapidly developing young minds of our children.

After a great deal of thought and deliberation devoted to the problems we face, including the shipping of our students away from their homes for nine months every year, many questions presented themselves. For instance: What can best motivate our young people toward involvement in our rapidly changing environment? What will stir enthusiastic interest? What will give them experience as well as knowledge? What will best fortify them in facing the world and the society of the larger towns and cities with dignity and know-how.

To my way of thinking, government seemed to be the answer to my self-posed questions. Government and politics. Government on the local level and the state level and the national level. It is taught in the schools. But how is the subject taught? Is the involvement of the students required? If not, why not?

There are individual teachers who are teaching government in this way. It is good. Government education should be presented in a manner designed to create involvement and excite interest. It must of necessity deal with current activities.

The students should be familiar with the workings of local government from the school board members to the mayor of their village or town. The teacher should be able to bring to their attention a local matter which would directly affect them.

If it is a school matter, take

them to the school board meeting. Let them participate and offer ideas. If it is a local matter, take them to the local council meeting. Involve them. Stir their interest. When they have become familiar with local government, take them to the state level. Involve them in some current activity which affects them. Have them support or oppose an activity.

It can be exciting and what better way to prepare them for life in the future in any society? The involvement of the Natives in government during their young years will have gain-

ed them insight, knowledge and experience. The knowledge will add to their pride. With pride comes dignity.

Next, of course comes national government. The Congress, the Senate and the President of the United States. The same method would be employed. Explore and find something which would directly affect the students. Send for materials. Bills before the House of Representatives or the Senate, Congressional Records. Research the subject of interest. Decide to support or oppose it. Write to the Congressmen and Sena-

tors. Teach the students how to help themselves and others.

Involvement is the key word and as I stated previously, we know that this method is taught on an individual basis. I am interested in supporting this as a required method of teaching our students government.

In conclusion, I repeat, the ideas presented herein are based on my experience. I am suggesting that the Second National Indian Education Conference give serious consideration to the idea that the method of teaching government described be adopted on a national level.