

Morris Thompson visits Alaska

Thompson and area director Clarence Antioquia meet in Bethel to discuss Alakanuk school situation

Commissioner of the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs Morris Thompson, visited Alaska this past week to discuss problems of the Native people of Alaska with some of Alaska's Native leaders.

Thompson, and area director from Juneau, Clarence Antioquia, met in Bethel with school officials from Alakanuk to discuss the situation concerning Alakanuk school.

The village of Alakanuk moved about two miles downriver in 1966 because the Yukon was eroding the old site. The school stayed at the old site and the 150 children traveled across the river to school. BIA was supposed to construct a new school at the new village site in 1975.

A month ago the villagers said that starting next fall they would not send their children to school unless BIA moves the school to the new village site.

Thompson has given Alakanuk several interim options for educational facilities for the next school year. Four of the options are: (1) move the old facility to the new village site; (2) upgrade homes in the new site to serve as an interim school; (3) ask the state for the use of a portion of the high school to use until BIA can construct the new building; and (4) bring in temporary facilities until the new school can be built.

Thompson stated, "I am positive that the appropriations for the new school will go through. They have passed the House of Representatives and I've talked to Sen. Ted Stevens about their status in the Senate."

In Fairbanks Commissioner Thompson commented on BIA's intent in establishing the Regional Educational Attendance Areas (REAA) to take over the jurisdiction that the previous State Operated School System (SOS) had.

He said that BIA's intent is to make a positive choice in concert with the village.

Antioquia added that BIA will only control those areas that ask to be controlled. As of now BIA will still have control over 48 schools in Alaska.

When asked why so many BIA schools have burned over the

past few years Thompson responded saying that in the remote villages there are no fire departments and no running water, so when a structure catches on fire there is not much the local communities can do to stop it.

He added that arson was expected in a few cases but no one has ever filed suit.

Antioquia also pointed out that many of the schools are older. When they were built they were up to the fire standards that were in existence at that time. BIA is trying to update

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schools to meet the present regulations.

Concerning the 2(c) study, a study done concerning section 2(c) of the Alaska Native Claims Act that reviewed existing federal programs and the Alaska Natives, Thompson commented that the study was completed and reviewed by Congress but as of yet nothing eminent has come out of it.

He added that the Indian Policy Review Commission established by Congress is investigating Indian Programs and their task forces will report to Congress in July. By the end of the year the commission will submit a report with recommendations to Congress.

Thompson sees the future of BIA in Alaska as a tool using a different delivery mechanism. "We will allow regional management and conduct."

He went on to say that many of the previously BIA-operated programs are now being locally controlled.