

# letters

## Dental clinic

USPHS Hospital  
St. Paul  
Alaska, 99660

Dear Governor Hammond:

I am writing this letter in response to the ad on page 16 of the April 1979 'Break-Up' Edition of the Tundra Times. The ad asks for support of H.B. 401 "Dental Programs for Rural Alaskans".

While I do agree that delivery of dental care to isolated rural Alaska is an important issue and certainly poses a problem, I cannot condone the tremendous expense of purchasing and equipping these mobile dental clinics. I do not know the exact figures, but I am told that the Aleutian/Pribilof Island Association's van (pictured in the ad) and a support truck (not pictured) cost in the neighborhood of a couple hundred thousand dollars.

I ask you, what sense is there in owning a mobile clinic when for the most part the rural villages in Alaska are not reachable by roads? That is the case on the Aleutian Chain and certainly the Pribilof Islands. The expense of flying these units from place to place by air cargo plane has to be prohibitive aside from just plain impractical. The villages needing dental care the most probably don't even have landing strips large enough to handle the size plane needed to haul these things around.

Beyond that, as far as St. Paul and St. George villages are concerned, both places have more than enough space in their respective PHS clinic facilities to set up dental equipment. In fact, both clinics already do have functional dental equipment and dental chairs permanently installed. They are utilized by the Alaska Native Health Service Dentist when they are here on field trips, and are also used episodically by the Doctor and Physicians Assistant on St. Paul and St. George for emergent dental care provided in the absence of a Dentist.

Last summer, eighteen people making up the volunteer dental staff from San Francisco, California arrived here on St. Paul

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on August 20. While their time and expertise was given freely, travel expenses for the group probably exceeded my entire years salary as the PHS Physician here on St. Paul. The Mobile Clinic Van and Support Truck had been flown in a few days earlier on a C-130 Transport plane. Once set up and in operation, only two of a total of ten dental chairs were located in the Mobile Clinic, the other eight units were portable and were set up in the Public Health Service Hospital building.

The Mobile Clinic Staff are a great bunch of people and were well received. They did see a tremendous number of patients, providing them with all forms of dental services. We are all very grateful to these volunteers and for all the work they did. The issue of whether or not to grant folks like these temporary permits to practice their professions is not the subject this letter is addressing, but it seems to me that any well qualified and licensed to practice professional coming to Alaska on a volunteer basis ought to be granted temporary licensure, particularly if they are going to work in one of the more isolated locations.

What has really got me bothered is the fact that since the dental group left St. Paul the Mobile Clinic and Support Truck have been stored away and left entirely unused. Rent is being paid for this space in addition to the depreciation of thousands of dollars worth of equipment. The unit never even got to St. George, nor was any resident of St. George brought here to be seen while they were here. Other villages of the Chain, also never visited.

A far more intelligent use of that money would have been to upgrade the present equipment located in the existing clinics. This could have been done at a fraction of the cost of these fancy vehicles.

The mobile clinic concept is widely used in the lower forty-eight states where even the most isolated of rural communities are usually accessible by roads. For isolated villages in Alaska, however, the problems posed in getting the mobile van to the places where dental services are most needed precludes its usefulness and

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makes the cost/benefit ratio quite beyond reason.

I would like to see the APIA do something with this expensive showpiece, rather than have it continue to sit out here unused and perhaps rusting away as do most vehicles. Nine months have passed since it was put into storage. No other village has benefitted from it being parked out here. State funds can be better spent in trying to provide dental care for isolated villages, preferably not by spending vast sums on such impractical and non-utilitarian ventures as mobile clinics which are so quickly immobilized once they leave the streets and political arenas.

The views expressed above are purely based on my own observations and opinions. My comments should not be taken to represent the position or policy of the United States Public Health Service or the Alaska Native Health Service.

Sincerely yours,  
John Midthun M.D.  
Chief, Pribilof Health  
Service

## Skoog replies

April 25, 1979

Dear Editor:

I noticed in the TUNDRA TIMES edition of April 18, 1979, you printed a letter that was sent to the Governor from Tom Craig, Executive Director, Copper River Native Association. In the letter, Mr. Craig accused me of making derogatory statements about the Copper River Natives regarding a violation of salmon fishing regulation in the Copper River area last summer.

In my opinion, I have not made any derogatory statements against these people. A violation of fishing regulations did occur and citations for this violation were issued by protection officers of the Department of Public Safety as is normal procedure. These citations later were dropped when the emergency regulations for taking salmon were changed. I recognize well the need for

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the Copper River people to take salmon for subsistence purposes, and the Department does intend to provide for this need as long as the resource is adequate.

On March 29, 1979, I sent the enclosed letter of response to Mr. Craig in an attempt to explain the remarks that I had made in Washington, D.C. concerning the "Copper River incident". I hope this letter will

give some explanation to your readers. My Department is now in the process of hiring a staff for the newly-created Subsistence Section and it should be implemented fully sometime this summer. The Chief of this Section, Dr. Tom Lonner, and his Assistant, Mr. Paul Cunningham, were present at the recent hearings held by the Boards of Fisheries and Game in Anchorage at which they discussed regulations for

the coming year regarding the subsistence take of fish and wildlife. I believe Dr. Lonner and Mr. Cunningham represented the rural people very well at these hearings and, generally, I believe the actions taken by the Board were quite good.

I want to assure you that this Department intends to carry out the intent of the new State subsistence law. We will make every effort to see that the needs of the rural people are taken care of.

Sincerely,

Ronald O. Skoog  
Commissioner

Mr. Tom Craig  
Executive Director  
Copper River Native Association  
Drawer H  
Copper Center, AK 99573

March 29, 1979

Dear Mr. Craig:

I have received your letter of March 21, 1979, regarding my presumed derogatory remarks concerning the Copper River

people. I am somewhat perplexed as to why you should consider my testimony given in Washington, D.C., in late February as being derogatory but I will attempt to explain to you the situation surrounding the statement I made during the panel discussion.

The panel appearing before the House Subcommittee chaired by Congressman Breaux was concerned with the subsistence issue. My prepared testimony contained no reference whatsoever to the Copper River area. At the conclusion of all the prepared testimony a general discussion ensued and Alaska Federation of Native's representative, Don Mitchell, brought up the Copper River "incident" of last year as an example of the lack of consideration the Department of Fish and Game has had for supporting the subsistence needs of rural people.

In explaining that incident to the Subcommittee I gave the background of the problems associated with the "subsistence fishing" for salmon in the Copper River last year. As you are well aware the salmon run was much lower than expected and the Department was obligated to impose restrictions on that fishing effort in an attempt to provide for adequate escapement of salmon for the spawning grounds. The initial emergency order closed down the season to weekends and therefore the fish wheels were not allowed to operate during the week. The Emergency Order as initially written was a poor decision but nevertheless any fishing that occurred during the week was illegal.

Apparently some of the Copper River residents decided to fish for salmon with their fish wheels during the week in direct violation of the Emergency Order. This violation was detected by the Fish and Wildlife Protection Officer for the Department of Public Safety, and subsequently he issued citations to four of the residents who claimed to be responsible for the illegal action. Later after discussions with the local people of the Copper Center area, the emergency order was revised to allow fish wheels to be operated throughout the week and the citations that had been issued were dropped. I at-

tempted to explain this situation to the Subcommittee.

In my opinion the statements made were not derogatory relative to the Copper River people, and therefore I see no need for any apology nor for any withdrawal of the testimony I gave to the Subcommittee. I am well aware of the need for the subsistence taking of salmon by the Copper River people and by other peoples throughout rural Alaska. The Boards of Fisheries and Game are attempting at this time to develop good regulations for subsistence, and in particular the Board of Fisheries will establish some logical and good regulations that will provide adequately for the subsistence needs of the Copper River people.

I think I can assure you that our Area Biologists in charge of salmon fisheries are quite sensitive now to the subsistence needs in any future emergency orders that may be necessary to protect the salmon stocks. Subsistence use is a priority use under State law and we fully intend to carry out our responsibilities under that law.

Sincerely,

Ronald O. Skoog  
Commissioner