

NCAI director promises solidarity for Alaska, Outside Natives

By BILL HESS
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Anchorage was chosen as this year's NCAI convention site to give Alaska Natives and Indian from the Lower 48 the opportunity to see that they face the same challenges, and that unity will benefit them all.

"We are the same, we are one!" Ron Andrade, the Executive Director of NCAI explained, "We want it clearly understood that Alaska Natives are not alone," Andrade, who comes from Southern California, insisted. "If an issue becomes a fight for Alaska Natives, then it becomes our fight. We shall have solidarity! We will use our resources, and our power to help. If we have a fight, then we will ask the same help from the Alaskan Natives."

It was very clear that policies of the Reagan administration are threatening all Native Americans in similar ways: the loss of job programs in areas where there is little or no private industry to

take up the slack; cutbacks in housing where shortages are already critical; reductions in health and medical care where it is below national standards, and the closure of schools where education is already deficient.

Andrade stated that one purpose for drawing so many people together was to give them the chance to see and hear not only themselves, but also many of the federal people from Washington who are in charge of implementing many of the president's policies.

This would give the different Native and tribal delegates the opportunity to discuss and evaluate these programs for themselves, and to find ways to encounter new developments which run against the interests of Native Americans.

It also would give the federal people a chance to see the Natives in action. "We want to prove to them that Indians are not cry babies," Andrade stressed. "We can provide new direction to our people when it is needed."

Andrade also claimed that NCAI has done much over the past year to benefit and protect all Native groups. When the new administration first began planning ways to distribute block grants to the states to allow them to carry out programs formerly administered by the federal government, they intended to give the responsibility for Indian programs to state governments. "NCAI became involved very early in convincing the administration that tribes should be considered equal with the states" in receiving and administering block grants. It worked.

NCAI also fought for and saved the Office of Indian Rights, which former presi-

dent Jimmy Carter had tried to eliminate; gave special protections in the Senate Select Committee which screens legislation in search of bills and amendments potentially damaging to Native people, and fought against education and housing cuts. "Any HUD houses which were saved were saved because of the leg work by the NCAI staff!" Andrade said.

Andrade claimed that Indian groups also recognize that social programs have been growing too fast, but believes that some are necessary. He was particularly distressed by White House plans to slash the budget an additional 12 percent beyond cuts already made. This, he said, was a method of abrogating the federal trust responsibility to Native peoples by budgetary decree.

Andrade stressed that NCAI has established the goal that tribes and Native governments gain economic strength and independence beyond the federal dollar.

NCAI has already initiated its own programs designed to establish trade between Indians and foreign nations, and to encourage national and international industry to locate on the reservation. This would create jobs which would attack structural unemployment.

"CETA, the Comprehensive Education and Training Act, (a federal job training program which is getting axed) does not attack structural unemployment," Andrade explained. "When you take an unemployed person, put him on the job for two years, he is still unemployed when that two years comes to an end. If you can establish some permanent industry, like the Mississippi Choctaw have with Hallmark cards, then you have attacked structural unemployment. You have jobs which are attached to the economy, not to the federal dollar."