

## Continued vigilance, commitment needed to reform the prejudicial culture in Guard

The *Anchorage Daily News* performed a valuable service to Alaskans when it published a story on June 25 detailing the outrageous harassment of Kimber Kyle, a six-year veteran of the Alaska Army National Guard. It stated that the following message was left on Kyle's answering machine:

"Kimber Kyle, this is Sgt. Chuck Jones. I'm sure you remember me, of the Alaska Army National Guard? I'm putting you guys on fair warning. I'm after you. And I'm gonna get your ass. My number is 907-428-6564.

"It's official now—I'm coming after you *militarily*. I'm gonna get you. Goodbye."

Spoken like a real Soldier's Soldier, eh? If this isn't conduct unbecoming a member of the National Guard, and a non-commissioned officer at that, we don't know what is. Yet interviews and records obtained by the Daily News make it clear that this was only the latest in a long line of insults and injuries heaped on Kyle by peers and superiors. And it certainly squares with the research *Tundra Times* has done on the institutional racism and sexism rife within the Guard.

This story was important for several reasons.

First, it established clearly that bias in the National Guard is not simply a racial issue. The racial aspect of the problem, egregious enough though it is, doesn't always stimulate the kind of action that's necessary to bring about fundamental change. Perhaps non-Native Alaskans will now feel they have a substantial investment in that change.

Second, fundamental reform of the most far-reaching depth and scope is necessary in order for the Guard to function as a cohesive, productive model of service to community and country. It is abundantly clear that there are those in the ranks who have completely missed, or chosen to ignore, the the implications of the widely-publicized recommendations of a Board of Inquiry appointed to investigate bias in the Guard.

It's bad enough that Kyle got her message in January, just before the Board of Inquiry was convened. Even more amazing, infuriating, even depressing, is what happened after Kyle complained of the abusive message. Not only was Jones only mildly reprimanded, officials who report directly to Lestenkof actually made excuses for the mild rebuke.

It is exactly for this reason that we view Lestenkof's decision to retain as key advisors, in the name of continuity and stability, some of the very officers accused of serious acts of racial bias. These men may have their strengths as military experts, but they don't have the pulse of the community they are supposed to serve. Racism and sexism in the Guard don't need stability and continuity, they need a heavy, steel-toed boot. Sometimes the social surgery needed to save a vital, cherished institution is messy, and risky. We feel in this case, doing the right thing is more than worth the risk.

Furthermore, developing the policies to effect this reform demands the focused attention not only of Adjutant General Jake Lestenkof, but Governor Tony Knowles himself.