

# Communications Lack

In the more than two years since the passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, the regional Native corporations, with interim directors and hastily assembled staffs, have for the most part done an admirable job in meeting extremely taxing deadlines and requirements created by the ANCSA.

Yet, it seems to us that a massive problem has yet to be tackled by the corporations. The first annual meetings of stockholders, Alaska Natives, in these corporations have been scheduled for March and April. But most Natives remain as unaware of the benefits of the Settlement Act and the operation of regional corporations as they were on the date of the act's passage.

Even with distribution of informational materials by Native corporations and organizations and substantial media coverage of land claims implementation, there is very little understanding on the part of stockholders of how their corporations will work for them and manage settlement proceeds.

Almost all communication on basic operations and approaches of the corporations has been limited to two classes of people. On one end of this self-contained dialogue are the officers and interim directors of the Native corporations, and on the other end rest the technicians, who are lawyers and tax consultants and corporate planners.

The corporation's decisions, business transactions, and formation of policies have been based almost exclusively upon the interaction of these two groups of people. And, often, we have observed that the technicians seem to spend more time talking with each other on corporate business than they do with their clients.

This situation, largely, is easily understood. The creation of corporations is a complex process, especially when their organization is governed by such a complex document as the ANCSA. It is necessary to hire expertise, and to retain the most knowledgeable consultants. And, the corporations have been under tremendous pressure to comply with deadlines enforced by the act and meet other organizational requirements.

Yet, as the pressures ease in meeting the more difficult demands of managing corporations in their formative stages, much more attention must now be given to providing greater information to the stockholders. This effort should not be delayed until the time of the meetings themselves because all of the stockholders will not be able to attend these meetings, and because the members must be prepared to decide some basic policy matters.

A number of the interim officers and directors of individual corporations have prided themselves in their capacity for secrecy and in their ability to keep their operations secret from other Native corporations. It is understandable that corporations should possess information which should not be passed to other corporations or individuals, but it is something else to withhold information about corporate operations from the stockholders who are owners of the company.

We are extremely pleased with many talented individuals within the corporations who have risen to meet formidable challenges in organizing the corporations. Yet if some of the interim officers and directors should inadvertently foster ignorance of the operations of the corporations on the part of the stockholders, they may discover such ignorance to be a very unsettling factor.