

Hammond says no to BIA school proposal

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The massive cost of upgrading 37 Bureau of Indian Affairs Day schools is too much for the state to bear so Gov. Jay Hammond has decided to seek relief from the Alaska Congressional Delegation to avoid state takeover of the schools.

Hammond last week announced that he is dissatisfied with the response he has been getting from the BIA on the transfer of the 37 day schools and Mount Edgecumbe BIA boarding school to the state.

The BIA has made two proposals for the turnover of the federal schools to the state, but Hammond is unhappy with both because, he said in a recent letter, they do not include nearly enough money to bring the rundown schools up to minimum state fire and safety codes.

Hammond sent his letter to Under Secretary of the Interior in charge of Indian affairs Ken Smith, stating that he will seek help from U.S. Senators Ted Stevens and Frank Murkowski and Rep. Don Young to solve the problems with the BIA.

The BIA has made two proposals on the transfer, one that only 16 of the day schools be transferred immediately and the rest of the transfers will come at the end of the 1983 school year; and the other that all the 37 day schools be transferred immediately with a \$5.9 million in federal aid to help pay for the transfer.

Both are unacceptable, said Hammond, because of the high cost of running the schools.

He estimated that the cost of running the 16 day schools would be an additional \$8.9 million while it would cost \$18.5 million to assume and run all the schools.

Those costs also don't include the cost of improving the schools themselves, most of which don't comply with state regulations on the code and safety codes.

He estimated that \$24.5 million would be needed to improve the 16 schools, and \$52.9 million to bring all the schools up to standard.

These estimates don't include the cost of funding Mount Edgecumbe which has received an appropriation of \$2.9 million in state money to match federal funds and operate next year. That appropriation has cleared several House committees and needs to be voted upon by the House and Senate.

If the Mount Edgecumbe appropriation is approved, all rural students will attend the school which now serves only Alaska Native students.

Hammond also stressed in his letter that the plans to transfer the schools to state control have not been approved by individual village councils and that is required by BIA regulations. Only 10 of the 37 schools have agreed to state control.

In his letter that the plans to

His criticism also was aimed.
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Impasse prompts fears for school openings

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at the short amount of time that the BIA is giving the state to adjust to the turnover. The BIA has been talking about the turnover for months but no specifics have been handed down. Now, when the state Legislature is two-thirds of the way through the legislative session and well into the budgeting process, it is asked to spend more money on education than it had bargained for.

A spokesman for Hammond said the governor hadn't received a response to his letter and was awaiting word from the congressional delegation.

Neither Stevens nor Mur-

kowski had received a letter from Hammond on the situation and couldn't comment.

Jake Lestenkof, area BIA director, was also unavailable for comment.

Chuck Kleeschulte, a Hammond press aide also said he doesn't believe the state will sue to stop the transfers because, even if the state was ruled right within the necessary short time limit, the courts couldn't force Congress to budget money to pay for the BIA schools.

Gordon Jackson, an aide to State Sen. Nels Anderson, said this most recent turn of

events is worrying him because of the position it may leave the students in in the state.

"My only fear is that Congress already has made up its mind and we are putting ourselves in an impasse situation and the schools might not open this fall," because the state isn't ready to assume control.

Jackson, who worked as an aide to State Rep. Al Adams on the House Finance Com-

mittee before being assigned to Anderson, said recent announcements of more "short-falls" of state revenue, could further hurt the situation.

The state had been expecting to receive \$3 billion in oil royalty money for the year but because of a recent excess of oil on the international markets, the cost-per-barrel is rapidly being revised downward, which means less royalty money for the state.

That forecast for the amount of money that the state will receive from oil could be as low as \$1.2 billion. Current budgets now call for \$1.6 billion in operating budget and if the revenues go any further down, more cuts in the already trimmed operating budget may occur, said Jackson.

Jackson said that legislators will probably know this week if further cuts in the operating budget are needed.