

Spud Williams takes TCC reins from Al Ketzler

The Tanana Chiefs Conference, meeting in annual session last week, tabled proposed by-law changes that would have significantly altered the organization's present structure and elected William "Spud" Williams as its new president.

Williams defeated incumbent Al Ketzler in an election that was seen by most as a personification of the debate over whether the Chiefs should scrap their present structure in favor of a different one. The amended by-laws would have made the president of the Tanana Chiefs Conference a chairman of the board and authorized creation of a management team answerable to the executive board of the Conference. Ketzler, who had not been a paid president since he became head of the Community Enterprise Development Corporation last year, ran as an advocate of the by-law changes. Williams ran on the principle that Tanana Chiefs should have a full-time working president.

Williams explained the delegate voting on presidential candidates and by-law changes by saying: "They want Tanana Chiefs to be an advocacy agency, not a business."

It was an emotional moment when six-term President Ketzler announced to delegates, "Well, my time is up, you have a new president."

Amidst delegates' applause, Mitch Demientieff of Nenana immediately took the floor and put into words what the convention had intended to say with its ballots:

"We were voting on a key, crux issue. We want a working president and we're running on a non-working president. Except for Andrew Isaac, you are Mr. Tanana Chiefs, Al." (Andrew Isaac of Tanacross is the traditional chief of the conference).

Williams then took the microphone and reiterated that Ketzler would most likely have been re-elected to a seventh term had it not been for the organizational problem inherent in his absence from day-to-day operations.

When delegates from the 40 plus Athabascan villages of Interior Alaska responded to this statement with a standing ovation for Ketzler, the past president told them:

"You make me cry. All I can say is thank you very much."

Ketzler was the prime mover behind reviving the traditional Tanana Chiefs Conference in 1962. The last meeting of the Athabascan river chiefs before that year took place in 1915. The regional organization under his leadership became one of the most vocal and active advocates of a comprehensive Alaska Native land

claims settlement. The Conference recently became the first Native organization in Alaska to contract with the Bureau of Indian Affairs to operate all of the programs and services offered by one of its agencies.

In other convention news, Donald Honea of Ruby was elected vice-president; Mitch Demientieff, secretary; and Melvin Charlie of Minto, treasurer.

Tanana Chiefs Conference members elected to the executive board were: Andy Jimmy (Minto), Vernon Miller (Fairbanks), Nancy James (Ft. Yukon), Leroy Patsey (Nenana) and Ted Charles (Dot Lake).

In addition, delegates passed a lengthy series of resolutions, including the following:

- Supporting the village of Telida in its efforts to upgrade its runway;

- supporting Huslia in trying to set up a sawmill business;

- urging Wien Air Alaska and the Airline Pilots Association to resume good faith negotiations to settle the 10-month old strike;

- supporting Healy Lake, which is trying to obtain on-site services from the Indian Health Service, and

- opposing the opening of the North Slope Haul Road to the general public.

