

Editorial—

Interim Need

Much talk is being heard in Alaska about the need for economic development and energetic efforts are being made to make this a reality. Economic development is being heard a great deal also in connection with the native people. This is a very fine idea and the need for it is great. We feel, however, the area where this can be

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made to work better is being neglected and this is the area where some of our people are attempting to do business with limited knowledge of what businessmen must do to make the enterprise succeed. This has proven to be a severe handicap in the effort to succeed. There is a need to remedy this lack.

There are institutes, seminars, special instructions given teachers, janitors, maintenance men, warehousemen, Head Start teacher directors, homemakers, and some others every year. These are very fine indeed and they help a great deal. But why not give the storekeepers and managers in villages a chance to learn something about business procedures? Many of the storekeepers in the outlying areas have little technical knowledge about business and very little is being done to help them along. This lack has resulted in failures of the stores they managed and this has hurt villages. Surely a simplified course can be devised that would give them better knowledge of business procedures which could help them a lot.

There are exceptions, of course, where some of the native store managers are doing exceptionally good jobs even without the benefit of any previous training. These men are to be commended. They could also become more valuable if they were given further training.

The United States has traditionally given its farmers assistance in producing better crops and this assistance has produced the finest farmers in the world. A bit of this same approach can, perhaps, be utilized here and give a helping hand to our chronically neglected village store managers, especially during the painful transition period the native people are going through at the moment.

True, a few of our young people are now majoring in business administration in colleges but that would not begin to fill the need in villages for a long time to come, IF they ever come back to villages. A native young man with a business degree would hardly be expected to come to the village with the present pay scales the village store managers are paid.

So there is a gap—an interim period—that will exist for a long time until, hopefully business opportunities mature in the outlying areas. Our village storekeepers need assistance for healthier store enterprises and the assistance could well prove to be a step forward in the economic development of our remote areas. This assistance could also prove valuable if bills like the Indian Omnibus Bill, now being considered in Congress, pass in the future.