

Alaska is in a critical period

To Sen. John Binkley:

We as Alaska Natives as a whole have had bills in the Legislature addressed or even passed which affect us all.

"Restrengthening Native Families and Communities" was the theme for the 23rd annual Alaska Federation of

Natives convention. Panels ranged from Maintaining Values in Changing Times and focusing on the youth of Alaska.

Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, wrote an opinion letter, "Money can't solve Native issues," written in the Nov. 6,

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• Key to harmony is identity in our people

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1989, issue of the *Tundra Times*. The most significant sentence was, "But it should have closed the door to the past." He emphasized billions of dollars spent on Alaska programs for Natives.

Most recently, there was a bill in the Senate which would form a commission to be funded \$300,000 in federal funds, \$300,000 in state funds, with the balance coming from private organizations. All this money was to be utilized for studying Alaska Natives.

From all these broad issues at hand in our state — has anyone simply pondered: "Knowledge of one's roots makes one strong."

Natives and Alaska need an awareness of their identity: not just the language, but the philosophy and traditions in all schools. Others believe parents should teach their children

why we are Native. We have been taught the history of the Western world in our education today.

Since Alaska is our home, the Native history should be part of the curriculum. Teach the young how we lived prior to discovery. Teach them why we existed in such a harsh environment. And teach them their identity to give them pride in their Native heritage.

Who are these people who have strived for excellence? Who are these people who have strong roots and progress today? It is those people who have solid roots — Japan for one.

There is a definite need for cultural activities to reveal to the unknown who we are. Hawaiians bestow their heritage in their dance and legends told to the visitors.

We need tangible ethnic people showing their past and not a book telling the world we live in igloos and eat

raw meat. How can a museum represent a tribe or a group of people when they are located 400 miles away or even farther. It is wonderful to know a heritage park will be open by 1992 in Anchorage, a step forward.

We need professional Alaska Natives who have graduated from colleges and universities to be role models for our youth. Those role models need to reveal themselves in our high schools, grade school and junior high. Our educational system needs to encourage our young. The youth need to be encouraged so that they can accomplish their aspirations.

It is essential for the young to hear, "You can do it."

Our state of Alaska is in a definite critical period. Our youth are committing suicide at alarming rates, leaving us perplexed. We have devastating alcohol and drug related deaths. We have grim statistics of where they mainly occur.

Does the village have any strong traditional ties, or is it assimilation that has caused it? Check the statistics and weigh the village and its cultural heritage. Chevak, for one, has revived and sustained its culture. Not only has Chevak bloomed in cultural aspects, their elders encourage their youth to get educated to obtain college degrees.

The federal government and the state of Alaska took our dignity as a Native people in Alaska. I believe a public apology has been long overdue.

We as Alaska Natives are following the same pattern as the Native American has already gone through. We have and are in stages of paternalism, dependency, Alaska Native rights and self-determination.

The key to harmony in our Alaska is identity in our Native people, using today's tools positively.

Sincerely,
Carol B. Gregory
Bethel