

After Disagreeing with Fairbanks Dormitory Concept ASNA Backs it

The Arctic Slope Association—the only one of three native organizations to openly oppose the construction of a \$1.9 million school dormitory in Fairbanks—has said that it will carry its protest no further and will now support the project.

"We wanted to voice our opposition for the record," said Joe Upicksoun, president of the advisory school board in Barrow, after a Wednesday meeting between officials of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the State Department of Education, the Fairbanks schools, and native leaders.

Now that this opposition is on record, the North Slope natives will support the construction of the dormitory, he added.

At the meeting, spokesmen

for the Tanana Chiefs and the Fairbanks Native Association voiced their support for the dorm. The Tanana Chiefs is an organization composed of 34 Native villages in the Yukon-Tanana drainage.

Financed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the dorm is slated for completion by July, 1972, and is to be built near Hunter Elementary School in Fairbanks. It will house about 200 students from the Arctic Slope and interior villages who need to attend schools in Fairbanks in order to complete their high school education. Currently, such students stay in private homes under the boarding home program either of the State or the BIA.

At the meeting Wednesday a

spokesman of the State Department said that the State has just about reached the saturation point for finding good homes for these students.

Much of the opposition to the dormitory was voiced by the executive director of the Arctic Slope Native Association, Sam Taalak.

Taalak stressed that the Arctic region had not been consulted on the project and that he opposed sending his children to the Fairbanks school where he had been told drugs were readily available.

The president of the Fairbanks Native Association, Tim Wallis, replied that native student need the dorm now. "If

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we wait until the drug problem is solved," he added, "we may never get a dorm."

Students will come to the Fairbanks schools whether or not they have a dorm, he said.

Upicksoun stressed that he was opposed to the plan because he did not want to send his children away from home before they are old enough to be on their own.

The love that a child gets is very important," he said, "and I see the dorm as something that puts him in an institution without love. I will move before I will send my child out of Barrow."

Rather than a dorm, the Arctic Slope people want a high school in Barrow to serve the people of the Arctic Slope region. Currently the school at Barrow only goes through the ninth grade and the closest high schools are about 600 miles away, either in Fairbanks or Nome. This year, Upicksoun said, the Barrow school, which is operated by the BIA, will graduate 45 from the ninth grade.

Taalak wanted to know why the money being used for the dorm could not be used for a regional high school in Barrow.

In reply, C.A. Richmond, area director of the BIA, said that the BIA is only putting its money where the State has told it to. The decision was made two years ago at Sitka in a meeting between native representatives, the State, and Congressional representatives.

The Alaska Commissioner of Education, Clifford Hartman, said that the State is trying to decentralize its educational program and, where there are 25 to 35 students of secondary age, is trying to operate a minimal high school program.

Concerning the Barrow situation, Hartman said that the city can either continue under the current BIA operation and try to get additional grades, can ask the State to take over the schools and the State will try to set up a

high school there, or can establish its own independent school system.

Discussing these points after the meeting, Upicksoun said that the school board has tried to get the BIA to establish a high school there but that the BIA has said that it has no money for the project.

The Arctic Slope will not ask the State to take over its schools, he continued, until the Natives can be assured of having control of the school system as they currently do through an all-Native school board.

Also, he added, Barrow currently has a good school and is not assured that the State will replace it with one of an equal quality.

Lastly, Barrow, he said, can not go independent due to a lack of money to finance a school system but admitted that the land claims settlement might change this situation.

Also, at the meeting, one native asked if any consideration would be given to Indian and Eskimo corporations for the construction of the dormitory.

Robert Dudley, chief of the BIA Division of Plant Design and Construction in Albuquerque, N.M. said that such a decision would be made by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior. If done on a competitive basis, then capable and experienced native corporations will be asked to submit bids as will non-native corporations.

Or the Secretary could decide that the contracts will be negotiated only with Indian groups he added.

Educational specifications for the dorm will be developed by a six-member committee, appointed at the meeting comprised of representatives from the University of Alaska, the Arctic Slope Native Association, the Tanana Chiefs Conference, the Fairbanks Native Association, the borough school district and Monroe School, a Catholic school in Fairbanks.