

The Awakening

There's been a lot said about "the awakening Alaska Native." Despite the flowery language, there's a lot of blunt truth behind this. The Alaska Native—from every trapline cabin, fishcamp tent and dormitory of higher-education institutions is waking up to the fact that he can swing a lot of weight when he wants to.

Voting results this year proved this. Mike Gravel, running against Ralph Rivers for the Democratic bid to Congress, had the support of powerful Native Associations in Barrow, Kotzebue and other areas. Gravel almost won, and his rural support at the polls was almost solid.

Almost, of course, is never enough. Our work is well underway, but there is still a long, long way to go. Native Associations, and it's questionable as to just how effective they have been, have been around for a long time. The Alaska Native Brotherhood was started over 50 years ago. Cook Inlet and Fairbanks groups were started four to five years ago. The new organizations at Barrow and Kotzebue and Bethel are still in infant growth stages, although quite numerous in their membership and community-support.

It's interesting to compare the individual "characters" of the Native groups in each of their stages. The Alaska Native Brotherhood has done a lot of good. It paved the way, from its southeastern origin, to people organizing in other parts of the state. But many now feel the Brotherhood is past its prime, that leaders of the organization are hindered by a charter and guidelines designed for 1913 and not 1966. These same critics feel reorganization might be in order to bring the older group up to its full potential for effectiveness.

In Fairbanks and Anchorage, two Native Associations that sprung into life just a few years ago appear to have

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passed the young, radical stage and have entered maturity. Perhaps at this level, able to work effectively from a solid reputation and with advice and help available in urban areas, these groups have done the most good.

And at Barrow, Kotzebue and Bethel, the new groups have just been born. Their sheer aggressiveness is enough to frighten more conservative elements in the cities. This, too, seems to be indicated in the poll results of Mike Gravel's bid for Congress. The Barrow and Kotzebue Associations backed Gravel so strongly that the effect back-lashed in the cities where voters were afraid of these radical new Native groups—all comprised of awakening Alaska Natives.

And now the call for a meeting of leaders has gone out.

The invitations are finding response from all areas of the state. A spokesman for the Arctic Slope Native Association, one of the "radical new groups," has said: "We definitely plan to send delegates!"

October is a good time. Most of summer's work is over and winter activity has not yet begun. Wood-cutting in preparation for below-zero temperatures will be going strong, but we believe that at least leaders could spare the time to meet and unite Alaska's Native people. And unity it will be. The older, the mature, and the young groups will meet and from their conference, we hope, a solid front will be forged.

The Native comprises one-quarter or more of Alaska's population. Despite this, it takes unity and solidity of action to make his presence felt. Already suggestions are in the wind for what might be put forth at the conference.

A possible Fairbanks delegate said he will suggest a joint funding by the Associations of a full-time Executive Secretary.

Cost of such a man would be around \$25,000 a year. This would give him a salary, a secretary, give him office space and some travel money. He could work full-time for the Native groups—lobbying in Juneau during the session and coordinating group efforts during other months.

Not a bad idea, we think. One of many good proposals that we hope will come from the conference.

We think the October conference of Native Association leaders will spark action where lethargy existed heretofore.