

"I may not agree with a word you say but I will defend unto death your right to say it." — Voltaire

Tundra Times



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Lost VISTA Volunteer And an Old Eskimo Strange Encounter Leads Into Extensive Analysis of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act

Land's End Village
State of Alaska
April 17, 1973

Dear Howard,

Something really special happened when the mail plane came through our village last week. There was a letter from a young fellow in Anchorage named Joe Ayagutug who is a distant relative of mine. He is the son of my wife's cousin who used to live in a nearby village.

Years ago when Joe became old enough to be starting school the people from the Bureau of Indian Affairs came and took him away to be educated in Wrangell. This made his family very sad and also very angry. They were sad because they would miss their son, but they were so mad because their son was taken away against their wishes and without their knowledge.

As for little Joe, he never came back to stay for good with his family because he was too young to know what was really happening. Growing up in an institution he gradually forgot how life was supposed to be in the village. When he did come back to visit his folks they did not know his new ways and he was no use at all around the house.

Since his own family died in an accident a few years ago, I guess that makes me one of his closest relatives in the world. In the letter he says that he wants to come back to the village and learn about how things were in the old days. For my part, I want to talk to him about how things are now-a-days. I often wonder about all of those children who were taken away from their families to be educated and then took up city ways. Wally has often told me about how exciting those cities are supposed to be but they don't sound so good to me. Maybe Joe can tell us about some of the things in AN ACT since he said in the letter that he got a job with one of the Regional Corporations that were created by AN ACT.

Wally and I looked up what it said about Regional Corporations in AN ACT and it set my English lessons back about a week. To begin with it seemed pretty clear what a Region was even if it wasn't clear why they did this in AN ACT, but Wally's explanation of what a Corporation was didn't make much sense.

I know what a company is or at least I can understand what it does, but he said that a Corporation was a Person under the Law and that this was an example of a legal fiction. But Wally had already told me a Person was a Human Being and that fiction was a story that wasn't true so you can imagine how confused I am getting.

Then I asked him if there was any place in the White Man's Law for Legal Truth. He didn't say anything so I asked him if a person who became a Corporation was still considered a human being. Well, he started getting a bit angry and I was getting more confused so I guess we won't talk about it for a while till things calm down.

Anyway, maybe when this young fellow from Anchorage gets here he will be able to explain some more about what AN ACT means for us out here in the villages.

Your friend,

Naugga Ciunerput

Tom Richards, Jr.'s Column--

Sees Alaska Native Influence in National Indian Affairs

(c) 1973 by
THOMAS RICHARDS, JR.

OLONGAPO CITY—Alaskans, if they are wise, can achieve a much greater voice in national Indian affairs than anybody might have dreamed.

The struggle between conservative and liberal elements, and between reservation and urban Indians, for control of national Indian affairs could become a footnote in the history of Indian affairs if Alaska villages were to seek after and obtain tribal voting membership in the National Congress of American Indians.

Even involvement on a region by region basis in this country's oldest and most widely national Indian organization would enhance the role of Alaska Natives in influencing national policy.

If each of the over two hundred villages, under rules governing membership in the NCAI, were to receive ten votes each, Alaska would overwhelmingly dominate national conventions. And, a modest application of minute fraction of the newly won resources available to the Alaskans could revitalize NCAI to give it the uncontested dominance in Indian affairs desired by its advocates.

Alaska has always been an afterthought in Indian affairs. Legislation, national studies, the language of national administrations, and speeches from the leadership predictably speak of American Indians "and Alaska Natives".

Few of the prominent figures in the field ever took notice of Alaska. This situation was altered slightly after 1966, and of those national leaders who came to our aid during the land claims issue, most express serious doubts about the wisdom of the settlement which we have chosen.

The settlement issue, more than anything else, can lead the way for greater involvement in national Indian affairs. Although Alaskans have tended to consider themselves independent of their "stateside" counterparts, the divisions are lessening.

Alaskans would like a greater

voice in determining national policy, especially in light of desires of many congressmen to reduce expenditures in providing governmental services to rural Alaska. Many Alaska leaders, in traveling widely throughout the lower forty-eight, have come to respect the methods employed by national Indian leaders to influence policy.

Similarly, traditional reservation leaders and urban activists alike have a growing appreciation for increased Native involvement in Alaska politics and the determination with which the Alaskans conducted the settlement lobby effort, whether or not they accept its provisions. And, many are watching for signs of innovation and prowess in the use of settlement proceeds.

Historically, Alaskan involvement in national organizations was regarded as little more than a device for padding membership rolls, while serious leadership positions alternated primarily between the Sioux and the Northwest. Recent developments, which some call reforms and others call crisis, have broadened the field.

Alaska may be immune from the circumstances which now create divisions on a national scale. The settlement affords Natives the opportunity to jump into the national scene with fairly standardized objectives. There are both elements of reservation and urban thinking in Alaska.

The majority prefer a land base, which is provided in the settlement. Others have the option of selecting only corporate development.

There are distinct regional divisions created along tribal lines present in the settlement, but the sense of community created during the unified movement to win the settlement will most likely override these on most issues, and certainly unified approaches will be required to handle problems of taxation and the challenges to regions organizing local governments for greater control over local affairs and development.

One might expect the old

guard and rising stars in the stateside leadership to thwart such an influx of youthful and imaginative Alaskans into what they may consider to be their private battleground.

Yet, they may recognize that the necessity of Alaskans to protect their own interests in the settlement, coupled with resources now available to them, would be factors permitting Alaskan involvement to solve problems which NCAI and NCTA have yet been unable to face.

For example, Indian land is lost yearly to taxation in staggering amounts because of the unwillingness of various tribes to pool resources in order to protect Indian land. Due to the nature of the Alaska settlement in which ownership is prescribed by simple fee title, Alaska Natives will have to confront the taxation problem as a first order of business. If Alaska Natives are denied the power base in which to fight tax loss on a national scale, Alaska can simply take all of its resources and protect its land and corporations alone.

The other major problem for Alaska Natives is the fact that many congressman and federal policy makers are coming to view the settlement as an excuse to abandon governmental responsibilities, rather than a settlement of property rights based upon historic use and occupancy.

Here again, if Alaska Natives do not tackle this problem from a position of strength within such an organization as the NCAI, it will deal with it alone.

It is clear that Alaska has, at the least, the two basic problems to solve in order to preserve the integrity of its estate. Alaska may decide to retain an independent posture within Indian affairs, and forego a shared strength in the national organizations, and solve its problems for itself.

Only, the problems which Alaska Natives face - which they realize that they must surmount - are the same problems that the national groups can't get together to attack. When NCAI, or even NCTA, begin to recognize this, Alaska will probably be courted and its enfranchisement viewed as a solution to serious national Indian problems.

If Alaska would like to pick up some "national Indian organization" character for glorified windowdressing, Alaska Natives could get together to shop for one of the thousands of "national Indian organizations", finance it, give it an efficient Washington office, and make it paramount in Indian affairs.

Beginning Japanese Writing

FAIRBANKS — A noncredit short course on "Beginning Japanese Writing" is being offered by the University of Alaska's Division of Statewide Services.

The course is designed for those who have a basic knowledge of conversational Japanese, and want to learn beginning writing.

The class will meet on Tuesday, from 7 to 10 p.m., May 15 to June 19. Interested persons may sign up in Room 105 of the Eielson Building on the university campus, at the Office of Short Courses.

For further information, phone 479-7221.

LETTERS FROM HERE AND THERE

Poem 'Ahnah' And Evelyn

Kotzebue, Alaska
April 24, 1973

Dear Howard:

It was with much pride mingled with tears, that I read the beautiful Poem "Ahnah" written by Tommy Richards Jr.

Thank you Tom - for expressing our thoughts as beautifully about "Ahnah" your grandmother and my mother.

Evelyn L. Conwell

Social Security Check Stopped

Nulato, Alaska
April 18, 1973

Dear Friend Mr. Howard Rock:

I was up there to your office the 12th to tell you my troubles but you was in Anchorage I guess.

I wish I had your education

then I might be traveling too on business. I think my luck has run out. They stopped my social security check for one whole year after paying big taxes and I'm 66 years old. What you think about that?

I went up to see a lawyer, or legal service, Tanana Chiefs, AFN, BIA, Native Association, but I didn't have the gall. It's not the money, it's just the way it's run. And I was going to throw a monkey wrench in there. I was just thinking someone read this might do something about it because I don't like someone have the same trouble after I kick the bucket. I still get sno-go's on credit, grub, whiskey, money. I have too much problem, as I say, I think I'm getting the rear end, just like I told you before.

The reason why I'm here — they robbed my check, or take the money out of my checks too much because I'm an old bachelor.

Anyway, don't feel sorry for me, Buddy. Best regards to all my friends, especially the Eskimos and Indians.

Good luck, Howard.

Fred Stickman, Sr.