

# Editorial



## *Mala deserves better*

Dr. Ted Mala, well known advocate for improving U.S.-Soviet cooperation in the North, and the University of Alaska Anchorage are involved in a dispute that appears to have gotten out of hand.

We urge those involved in this dispute to take a little time to cool off, then get back to the bargaining table and hammer out a system for working together. Getting rid of Mala is not the answer.

Ostensibly the dispute is over the organization of the Institute for Circumpolar Health Studies, created by the Legislature in 1988 and funded with \$250,000 in state money.

Mala, program administrator for the institute, says the disagreement is really over academic freedom. What programs should the institute undertake? Should it cooperate closely with the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, the Indian Health Service and the Soviets? Will Mala be allowed to focus on issues such as how to make Alaska's health aides more effective or must he target only more traditional approaches to research?

The university appears to be taking a stand that Mala is difficult to work with and is not taking direction from UAA officials.

We believe this is a dispute over the control of the institute and the money it brings to UAA.

We urge both sides to take a look at what the Legislature intended when it created the institute.

Clearly the Legislature intended the institute to be a part of the University of Alaska. But just as clearly, there would be no such thing as the institute if it were not for Ted Mala.

Although dealings with our Soviet neighbors are becoming commonplace these days, we must remind people that when Mala first started pushing for greater cooperation his ideas sounded far-fetched to say the least. Alaska-Soviet relations looked very, very different even three years ago.

The institute has an important mission to shed light on ways Northern nations can cooperate in solving specific everyday health problems faced by people who live in the North. We're talking about search and rescue, nontraditional health care delivery, rural health services and alcohol abuse.

Whether UAA has a medical school really is not part of this debate. Whether UAA has the wherewithal to take a leadership position in this arena is what needs to be asked.

We urge UAA to consider the importance of the institute and recognize Mala's pivotal role in making it work. We urge UAA to get behind the institute so that Alaska truly can take a position of leadership.

