

Rural school boards demand Lind resignation

By STAN JONES

Three rural school districts which held an unprecedented joint meeting in Kotzebue recently voted at that gathering to request that State Commissioner of Education Marshall Lind tender his resignation. The action came on the motion of Robert Schaeffer, Northwest Arctic School Board Member, and was supported unanimously by the boards of the Yukon-Koyukuk and Bering Straits districts. The vote of the Northwest Arctic board was also unanimous, with the exception of Chairwoman June Nelson, who abstained because of her membership of the state board of education.

Discussion preceding the three-board vote cited a long history of difficult relations between the DOE and the rural districts. Schaeffer said that the REAA's have had to fight the DOE bureaucracy for everything they've gotten, and he accused the Commissioner of double talk.

The two points of difference which seemed to loom largest in the minds of the board members involved the federal Office of Civil Rights and the Hootch

case. One board member said that Lind had promised the rural educators in private to support them in a battle over regulations required by the OCR, and had taken exactly the opposite position in public.

Schaeffer said that Lind had made commitments to Alaska Legal Services in the Hootch case which he could not meet. The focus of irritation in the Hootch case is regulations requiring community involvement in planning and evaluating school programs in the villages.

Legal Services sought to expand and tighten those regulations, and the revised version sought by Legal Services was promulgated by the DOE for comment by the REAA's and other interested parties. The state Board of Education later defeated the proposed regulations.

Lind was not available for comment, but Deputy Commissioner Bill Thompson said that Lind had never engaged in double talk. He also pointed out that rulemaking by the state DOE is subject to the Administrative Procedures Act, which specified how state agencies are

to collect public input during the regulatory process.

The three boards at the Kotzebue joint meeting also voted in favor of 100% state funding of all school programs in Alaska. At present, the state foots the entire bill in the bush, but borough and city school districts pay some of their own costs. The hope expressed in Kotzebue was that 100% state funding would ease the rivalry between urban and rural districts.