

AFN to have major role selecting panel

House to hold hearing on joint federal-state commission

by Steve Pilkington
Tundra Times reporter

A Senate report is calling for the Alaska Federation of Natives to have a strong hand in deciding who gets appointed to a joint federal-state commis-

sion to study Alaska Natives' plight.

The president and Gov. Steve Cowper must weigh suggestions from AFN before appointing any members to the commission, according to a Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs report.

"It is the committee's view that no commission members should be appointed until the president and the governor, respectively have received recommendations from that organization," the report said.

The Senate bill to establish the com-

mission, which passed last month, asks village and regional groups to make recommendations to the president.

But AFN's suggestions should have the most clout, according to the report on the bill submitted by committee

continued on page seven

• Federal-state commission selection

continued from page one

chairman, Sen. Daniel Inouye, D-Hawaii.

The House is expected to hold a hearing on the bill Tuesday.

The bill would establish a two-year commission — funded through federal and state government — to report the critical social and economic problems facing Alaska Natives.

After reviewing the value of federal and state programs, the commission would recommend changes to Congress and Alaska.

Julie Kitka, AFN vice president, said the group has not formed any suggestions yet about the appointment process.

But the AFN Board of Directors has scheduled to meet Oct. 17 to develop their plans and the selection process

should be fair, Kitka said.

"It's going to be as wide and as broad as possible," she said.

An important point to note about the report is that it calls for Alaska Native appointees to the commission to be selected from varied ethnic groups and selected from across the state, she said.

AFN is not expecting any opposition to the bill in the House, she said.

But it did face some opposition in the Senate before it was passed. The major opposition was from federal officials like Eddie Brown, assistant secretary for Indian Affairs with the Interior Department.

"We believe the creation of a commission is not the proper vehicle to address those problems," he said in an August Senate hearing.

But with some changes in the bill

before Senate passage, Brown is now expected to support the bill in the House, Kitka said.

The bill came as a result of AFN's report on the status of Alaska Natives, "A Call for Action," which the group published in January.

The commission would be funded by \$300,00 in federal funds and \$300,00 in state funds and the balance

from private organizations.

Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, said passage of the bill would ensure that Alaska Natives have a hand in fighting the grim alcohol, drug and domestic violence statistics they face.

"This bill would guarantee substantial Native participation in this important process," he said.