

Cowper's actions louder than words

by Paul Swetzof
for the Tundra Times

The saying that actions speak louder than words remains as true as ever. A review of some of the actions of the administration of Gov. Steve Cowper is revealing.

Cowper, and thus the state, express a desire to see Alaska Native cultures flourish. Cowper states that he believes in more local control.

The governor has said many times he wants to see Native people keep their lands. The words flow freely.

Let's explore some of the actions and policies initiated or continued by the governor. Actions do speak louder than words.

Cowper wants Natives lands to remain in Native hands. Yet the administration is constantly challenging

OPINION

the conveyance of Native allotments to the Native people who have, in most cases, utilized the land for generations for subsistence and other purposes.

If the state would not file objections to the claims, many, if not most, Native allotments would be conveyed by the federal government to the people who have waited patiently for years for their traditional land. The state objects to some claims because they say the lands are "mental health lands." Sometimes the state claims that the land stands in the way of their

"right of way" claims.

Many times the state has a hard time finding a reason and keeps asking for extensions of time to think of an objection. Whatever the excuse, the bottom line is many of our Native people are dying without ever realizing their dream of obtaining their traditional land. But don't worry, Gov. Cowper, because we all know you believe in Native lands in Native hands.

Local control, which is responsive to Native people, is a favorite saying of the governor. This is a great joke, unless the joke is being played on you. The cruel joke is on our villages and our people.

The governor's Department of Law, using considerable amounts of time and money, is fighting numerous court battles against our right to govern-

ments which reflect and are responsive to our respective cultures. Even when the state is not an original party to a dispute, the governor has made sure that the state often involves itself, as a friend of the court, or whatever, against village people.

The state has gone to court to prevent a village from keeping items of extreme cultural value in the village. The state has gone to court against our supreme right to claim and keep our children in their home villages, growing up with their proud heritage.

The state has challenged Native people's right to develop a tax base, fought amendments to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act which would allow for the transfer of corporation lands to village governments,

(Continued on Page Fifteen)

• 'Sweet talk' not enough

(Continued from Page Three)

and the list goes on.

Subsistence. The governor has stated on numerous occasions that he is absolutely in favor of the subsistence priority guaranteed under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.

Let's look at his support of subsistence. He has fought — and fortunately lost — a battle to keep the Kenaitze people of the Kenai Peninsula from exercising the subsistence priority, defending the state concept that the best use of salmon on the Kenai Peninsula is for sport fishermen first, commercial fishermen second. His administration has not fought a decision of the Board of Fisheries to deny subsistence to a number of isolated Southeast Villages and communities.

The state has attempted to gain management over some marine mammals, in order to allow non-Natives from anywhere and everywhere the freedom to hunt them down for sport, in direct competition with Native people who rely on the marine mammals

*To be fair, it is true
that the state has
supported continued
federal services. . .*

for nutritional, cultural and economic subsistence purposes. (This attempt was dropped after universal opposition from coastal villages made it clear that the state would be in for a heck of a fight.)

To be fair, it is true that the state has supported continued federal services and programs for Native people. They have supported the Aleut people in the struggle for World War II reparations.

However, I don't believe that the survival of our people and cultures is even a topic of conversation in state policy discussions. At the same time, you can bet that the influx of dollars from the federal government to the state is a big part of the conversation.

Governor, we don't want sweet talk and sour actions. We want sweet talk and sweet actions.