

UA School of Education Negligent

By FRED BIGJIM

There is an urgent need for experienced and credentialed Natives to involve themselves in the administration of higher education programs in the state of Alaska. Several events have contributed to this need. In recent years, the University of Alaska has initiated a rapid expansion into rural and predominately Native Alaska. The delivery of higher education to rural Alaska is being accomplished by the development of a system of community colleges, extension centers and the establishment of a Chancellor for Rural Education Affairs who reports directly to the President of the University of Alaska. At the present time, there are four community colleges and fourteen extension centers within the Rural Education Affairs administrative unit.

The University's expansion has been in response to a variety of needs. Some of these needs arise from the Alaska Native Land Claims Settlement Act which resulted in the development of over two hundred village corporations. Some are the result of court decisions which require the State of Alaska to provide high school education in any village which has at least nine eligible students. Other needs include the training of bilingual teachers and Native paraprofessionals in Education who have been employed as a result of ESEA Title I, VII, and other federal programs aimed at minority education.

At present, in spite of the fact that the majority of students in rural Alaska are Eskimo, Aleut or Indian, there are no Alaska Natives taking significant roles in the administration of any of the community colleges or extension centers. There are no Alaska Natives in decision or policy making positions in the entire State-wide University system. This year, the University of Alaska advertised the position of Chancellor for Rural Education Affairs. The finalists for the position were all non-Native. As in the past, the task of administering programs for Native Alaskans will fall upon administrators who have the required credentials, but who do not necessarily have a personal commitment to the Native culture and unique needs of students in Rural Alaska.

The University of Alaska with its vast resources throughout the state should make a diligent effort to involve credentialed Alaska Natives in decision making positions. One avenue of accomplishing this is to begin programs in the Schools of Education and administration to cater to the needs of rural Alaskans. The School of Education at all the University's campuses is negligent in their effort to reach out to rural Alaska or Alaska Natives.

We need a new administration in the Schools of Education to look into the educational needs of rural Alaska.