

# Native hire efforts promised, questioned

Associated Press

Juneau — Gov. Bill Sheffield said Thursday he is working to put more Alaska Natives on the public payroll. However, a Native spokesman responded that he isn't sure the administration is making a "serious effort" to resolve the problem.

In a speech to about 150 delegates at the 71st Annual Grand Camp Convention of the Alaska Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood, Sheffield said the state has posted a poor record in hiring Natives and other minorities.

"As of September 30th, we had 13,000 total employees, but only about 1,300 were minority employees — or less than 10 percent," Sheffield said. "That's about half what it

ought to be."

The problem won't be solved by waiting for qualified Natives to come knocking at the state's door, the governor said.

"Unless we reach out and recruit people, we're not going to accomplish anything," said Sheffield, who spoke without notes.

Brotherhood spokesman Robert Willard said later that one of the more than 80 resolutions being discussed at the week-long convention deals with Native hiring. It holds Sheffield personally responsible for the success or failure of the state's equal opportunity program, he said.

"Natives make up 23 percent of the state's population yet they hold only 2.8 percent of the state's jobs," Willard

said. "We have 429 kids from just the southeastern part of the state in college and we graduate about 125 each year. We do have qualified people.

"I'm not quite sure about his (Sheffield's) approach or if there's any serious effort to resolve the problem," said Willard, whose organization was founded in 1912 and has been instrumental in serving the needs of Native Alaskans.

Berry Best, director of the Division of Equal Employment

Opportunity, disputed Willard's figures but agreed the state needed to make a greater effort to get Natives on the workforce.

"He's using figures from the 1980 census and including women, children and the whole shooting match—not just qualified people—so that mixes things up a bit, Best said. "But that's not to say we don't have a job to do.

"We're going to monitor the expanded certification program

where you can go below the top five applicants to hire somebody. That (monitoring) hasn't been done," said Best, who came to the job two months ago.

"We're also going to step up recruitment," he said. "In the past, you'd have a vacancy thrown up on the board and expect people to come apply for it. Now we're going out to the community.

"We're going to show people we're for real."