

TCC-BIA CONTRACTS ARE EYED

Proposed Arrangement Questioned by Assoc. Of Interior Eskimos

By JEFF RICHARDSON

A decision as to whether the Tanana Chiefs Conference should be the only group to take over certain functions of the BIA in Interior Alaska may come sometime this week. The decision will come from the area director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Juneau, according to Chris Anderson of TCC.

According to Anderson, TCC has been pursuing the idea of contracting with the BIA to administer some BIA programs for nearly two years. He said TCC submitted a formal request for a decision last week.

If such a transfer should take place, the authority for such action would probably be the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, signed by President Ford in January. The act directs the Secretary of the Interior to enter into contracts with qualified Native organizations for the management of BIA programs such as social services, education, employment assistance, housing, plant maintenance, and tribal operations.

However, not everyone agrees that the Tanana Chiefs should

have sole responsibility for managing these programs.

John Heffle, president of the Association of Interior Eskimos, told the Tundra Times, "No one individual or group should be considered the sole source of contract ability."

He said AIE does not feel adequately represented by the Tanana Chiefs or the Fairbanks Native Association because they have not responded to the needs of AIE in the past.

Heffle said although both organizations have come to him seeking support for various projects, his group didn't receive "one bit of help" from them when AIE tried to get running water to residents of Eskimo Village.

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At its monthly meeting for February, about 20 members of AIE discussed the possibility of circulating a petition among the group. The association claims a membership of about 200.

Heffle said the purpose of the petition would be to state that the signers had joined AIE to gain representation and that they feel that Tanana Chiefs and Fairbanks Native Association cannot adequately represent their interests.

Anderson said that the position of the Tanana Chiefs Conference is that TCC should be the prime contractor for BIA programs. He said his group, because Fairbanks Native Association is represented on its board of directors, represents all Native people in Interior Alaska.

He added that TCC would prefer to sub-contract to groups such as FNA and AIE rather than have the Bureau of Indian Affairs award a series of separate contracts.

Although the Indian Self-Determination Act directs the Secretary of the Interior to use his discretion, within certain

guidelines, in assigning program management contracts, it is apparently too early to tell if there will be shared contracting.

When a Native organization submits a request to the Secretary of the Interior to manage BIA programs, the secretary must decide if the group has the ability to fulfill a contractual obligation. He must consider their ability to provide equipment, qualified personnel, knowledge of bookkeeping and accounting, knowledge of the programs to be managed, and community support for the contract.

Although the efforts of the Tanana Chiefs Conference to enter into contract negotiations with BIA precede those of the Association of Interior Eskimos, the BIA has not as yet made a commitment to any group.

Anderson said if the area director decides that TCC should not be the sole contractor, BIA will send out requests for proposals, which would be the first step in determining who will manage Native programs in Interior Alaska.