

# United Tribes of Alaska new IRA federation

By Bill Hess

Tundra Times

Tribal leaders from 37 Alaskan villages gathered in Anchorage last week, formed a new federation, and immediately called upon Senator Ted Stevens and the State of Alaska to extend recognition to Native tribal governments.

Sheldon Katchetog of Unalakleet introduced the first resolution to the United Tribes of Alaska, the group formed to represent Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 and traditional tribal governments. Katchetog's resolution was patterned after one taken in a village participation meeting sponsored by RurALCAP last month in Juneau.

The resolution urged Senator Stevens to reverse his position on the legitimacy of IRA and other tribal governments of Alaskan villages. Stevens has said that his position is that village sovereignty is a matter for the state government and its legislature to determine. Delegates were upset with that statement as tribal sovereignty in the United States is traditionally protected under a federal trust responsibility, protected from state interference.

Many tribes in the Lower 48 operate their own tribal courts, police departments, fish and game departments and levy taxes upon industry independent of state considerations. There has been a great deal of argument that because of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 and differences between Alaskan villages and Lower 48 Indian reser-

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PHOTO BY BILL HESS

Ted Katcheak, Victor Haldane, Weaver Ivanoff, Andy Hope, Charlie Edwardsen, Frank O. Williams, and James Strong caucus during the formation of UTA.



# UTA leaders gear up for future challenges



Willie Goodwin, Don Standifer and Charlie Edwardsen (Etuk) discuss a tribal governmental matter during a break.

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 vations, these same rights do not hold true in Alaska.

The tribal leaders feel otherwise, and, according to new interim Chairman Willie Goodwin of Kotzebue, more tribal governments can now be expected to assert the rights they feel are theirs.

Andy Hope of Sitka, whos IRA government has already taken the step of establishing a tribal government whose rulings in Indian child welfare cases have been upheld by mainstream courts, introduced the second resolution. In it, the UTA by unanimous vote called upon the State of Alaska, which does not now officially recognize tribal governments although it does do business with them in many cases, to establish a fact finding commission and look into state and

tribal relations, and to reach an amicable resolution with the tribes.

Other resolutions included one introduced by Charlie Edwardsen, Jr., calling upon the UTA to support the efforts of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference as it launches a task force to study the treatment of Alaska Natives.

Katchetag introduced another resolution calling upon UTA to begin looking into gaining delegate status within the United Nations. Another called upon the UTA to begin all future meetings with an invocation.

Don Standifer of Tyonek proposed a resolution calling upon the new organization to consider and discuss the findings and recommendations of the Alaska Statehood Commission at UTA's next meeting,



The first board of UTA, left to right. Willie Goodwin, Ted Katcheak, James Strong, Al Gozmer, Victor Haldane, Arland Dick, Max Angellan and Bill Barr.



and to decide "whether or not to endorse such action."

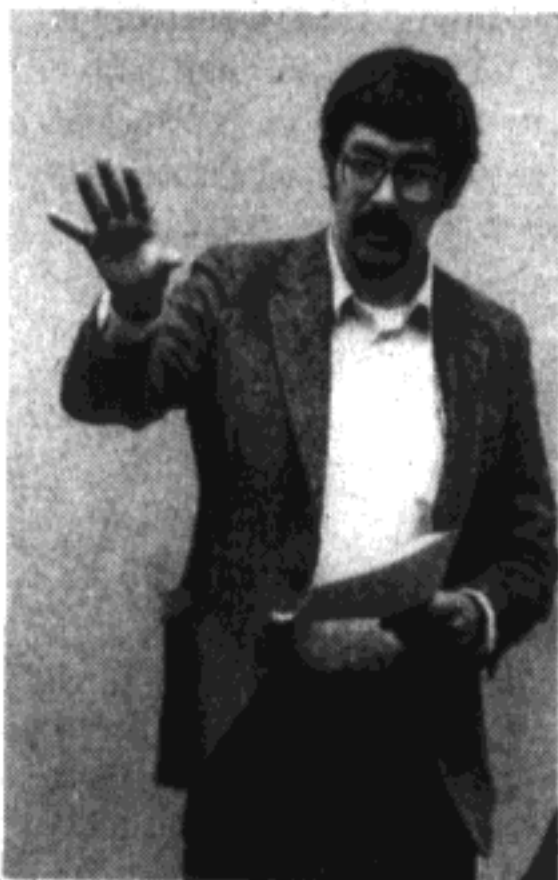
A final resolution commended Andy Hope and the Sitka Delegation along with Don Standifer and others who put together this first charter meeting of UTA.

Goodwin has become the first Chairman of the UTA by unanimous vote after Hope decline a nomination to run against him. Hope, who was very active in organizing the conference, said he would be happy to serve UTA in some capacity, but did not want to hold office at this time. Likewise, Don Standifer, who had been acting as chairman since tribal leaders decided to form a statewide organization after they gathered for an Alaska Federation of Natives meeting last March, declined all nominations for office.

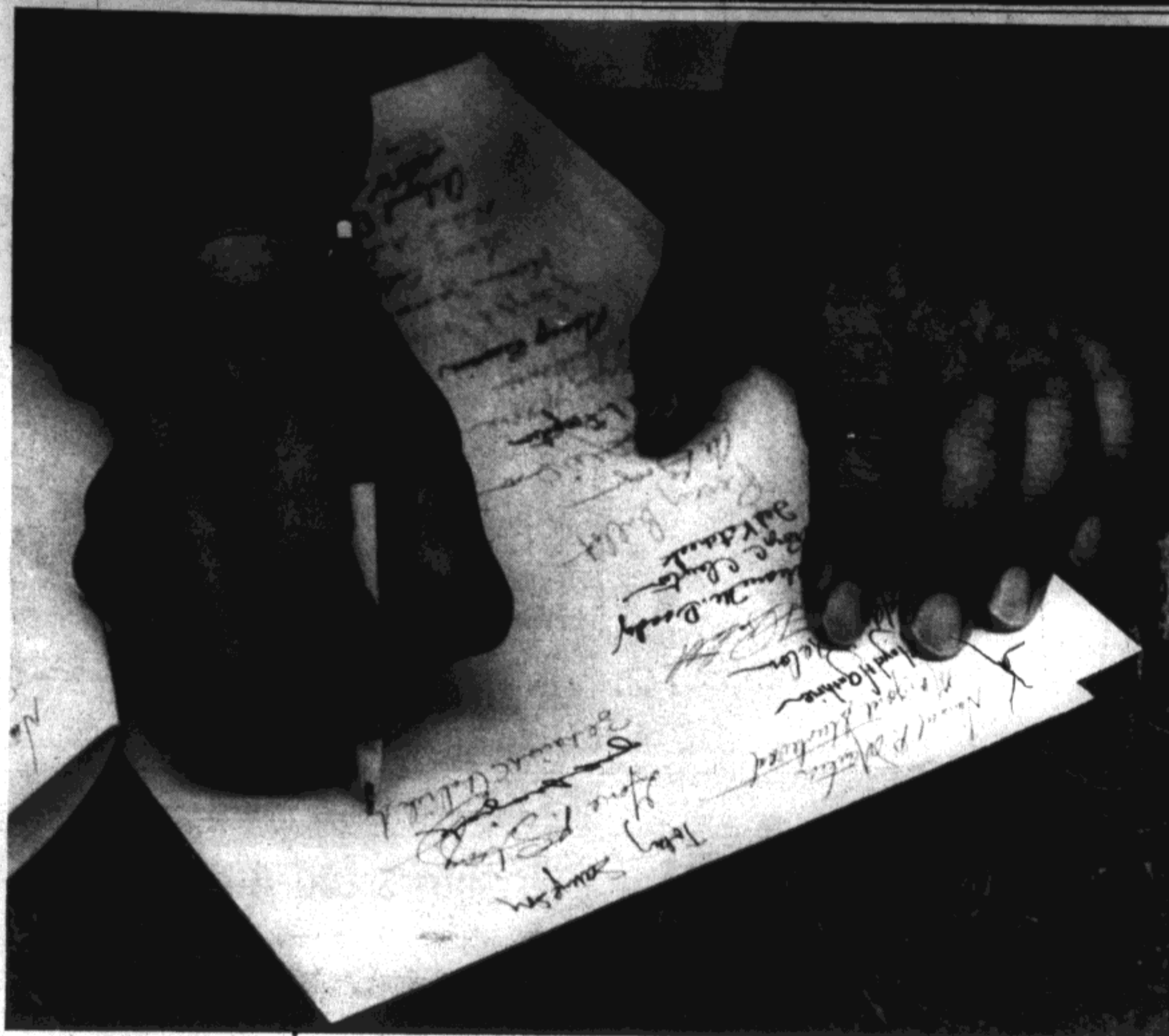
Other officers voted included Ted Katcheak of Stebbins as vice-chairman, Ava Walsh Edwardsen of Tanana as secretary and Al Goozmer of Tyonek as treasurer.

Another five councilmen were chosen to represent major ethnic groups in Alaska: Victor Haldane of Hydaburg was chosen to represent the Haida; James Strong of Skagway the Tlingit; Bill Barr of Shishmaref the Inupiat; Arland Dick of Tanana the Athabascan, and Max Angellan of Kwethluk the Yupic.

A sixth seat is being held for



Andy Hope of the Sitka Community Association.



A delegate signs the new charter of UTA.

PHOTOS BY BILL HESS

the Aleuts, who were not represented at the first meeting. Although there are over 200 Native villages in Alaska, leaders did not express much disappointment over the low numbers. Bill Barr pointed out that hunting season is beginning in many villages, and also noted that breakup is making it difficult to get in and out of some of the villages.

Bill Brady, president of the Sitka Community Association who served as moderator for much of the conference, and who was chosen as the official spokesman for the group, said he expects UTA to grow tremendously. "We're going to become a powerful force, both in Alaska and Washington," he predicted.

"I feel good about it," said Goodwin after the meeting. "It's a big step forward; it's been a long time coming!"

Goodwin said a task force has already been formed to determine how UTA can best wield political influence, to look at the relation between state and tribal governments, to seek funding and to look at other matters of importance to the group.

Although some media have announced the tribal government movement as a new thing, Goodwin said this is not so. The governments have been around and function for centuries, he pointed out. It is just that the threats and uncertainties left by ANCSA as 1991 approaches has motivated the governments to band together.

Goodwin noted that ANCSA did not even mention the IRA and tribal governments, and argued that those who say it put an end to their powers don't really understand the so-

vereignty possessed by the tribes and the federal governments responsibility to protect it.

What ANCSA did do, however, was to transfer tribal lands to state chartered corporations rather than the tribal governments, and to make them alienable come 1991. In other words, non-natives would be able to acquire Native lands through purchase of ANCSA corporation stocks, and lands could be lost if corporations were unable to pay taxes levied on them.

Goodwin stressed that each villages will have to decide the right way to protect its interests, and that UTA seeks to usurp no local authority or control. It does seek to present some possible solutions, and one already being looked at with interest would involve turning corporate land over to tri-

bal governments and having it held in trust status for the tribes by the Secretary of the Interior.

Children born after 1971, including two of Goodwin's four, do not hold any interest in the land under ANCSA.

"They're members of the IRA," Goodwin noted. He also encouraged any tribal villages who were unable to make the first meeting to join. "We're ending out our draft charters to every tribal government in Alaska," Goodwin said. Member villages are being asked to pay dues ranging from \$250 up to whatever they feel they can afford.

Goodwin also stressed UTA's intention to get along well and work closely with AFN, which represents the corporaitons and has also been looking for solutions to the problems posed by 1991.