

Washington man new NCAI chief

A veteran of the fishing rights struggle in Washington who vows to take the cause of Indian and Native American rights to the people of America, was elected president of the National Congress of American Indians last week.

Joe Dela Cruz, a 43-year-old tribal president of the Quinault since 1970, was elected by roughly 10,000 votes to 6,000 votes for his main

opponent, Don Wright, an Athabascan Indian from Alaska. The vote tally roughly broke down to the Lower 48 supporting Dela Cruz with Alaska delegates supporting Wright.

Under the NCAI voting procedure, tribal delegates hold 100 votes per tribe. In Alaska, each village constitutes a tribe so about 6,000 votes

(Continued on Page Sixteen)

Dela Cruz says he will use litigation to protect Native American rights

(Continued from Page One)
were cast from Alaska. Each delegate also held one vote.

Dela Cruz has vowed to take the cause of Indian rights to the people of America, who, he says, are unaware of Indian rights due them. He said that the American people are not aware of the many times that the federal government has ignored or broken treaties with American Indians and he warned that if the government breaks treaties with the Indians, the Constitutional right to free speech and freedom of religion will be next.

Dela Cruz said that Indians have been faced with the situation that when they take an injustice to the U.S. Supreme Court and win — the federal government doesn't carry out the mandate of the court.

He cited the example of a 1923 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in which the court ruled that Indian people have paramount rights for water into perpetuity. "Yet the U.S. and the state never carried out the ruling." He pointed out that his people worked to help settlers to Washington State in the 1890s but found themselves pushed out of the Pacific salmon runs by the early because of heavy White commercial fishing interests.

Dela Cruz said he will not hesitate to use litigation to force the state and federal government to live up to their end of numerous treaties they have with the Indian nations.

He said his tribe is taking the federal government to court because the government is, because of budget cuts, shutting down several Pacific salmon hatcheries in Washington and Alaska despite a formal agreement to keep them open. Dela Cruz said the government is cutting off its nose to save its face in that instance because the hatcheries produce millions of salmon for the Pacific coast commercial fishermen.

Dela Cruz was born in Hoquiam, Wash., and received an associate of arts degree in drafting/design and mathematics from the Multnomah Junior College. He went to work for the Quinault Tribe in 1967 as a business and general manager.

He was drafted by his tribe to run for tribal president in 1970 and says that during his time as president he became aware that ignorance and misunderstanding are the key elements of conflict between non-Indians of Washington and Indians. "This misinformed public dictated that Indians had to be fighting for their rights, not just through legal channels, but literally facing gunfire. Until Indians asserted their rights, they couldn't get their day in court. Activism by Indians is essential to the enforcement of these laws. Public education is the tool we will use to improve the lot of all Indians.

Dela Cruz is married to Dorothy Lemery and they have four children.

lected first vice-president at the NCAI was Alaskan Ralph Eluska, director of Comprehensive Fisheries Development program for the Alaska Native Foundation in Anchorage.

Eluska, an Aleut, is the first Alaskan Native to hold any of the four key elected positions with NCAI.

(See the Oct. 28 issue

of the Tundra Times for an interview with Eluska)

Eluska has served as the NCAI area vice-president for Anchorage since 1979. He also is involved in the World Council of Indigenous People and represented North American Native Peoples at the World Council meetings last spring.

He holds a bachelor of arts

degree in education from Fort Lewis College in Colorado; served as a special assistant to Assistant Secretary of the Interior Forrest Garrard from December, 1979 to September, 1980. He is married and the father of two children.

Clifford Black of Anchorage was elected Juneau area NCAI vice president.