

# Same old song

The words were all too familiar.

They were all too familiar for anyone who has been through the not-so-long-ago battles to pass the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

They were simple words — perhaps spoken with the belief that they meant what they said. But they have been said so many times before that they lead to only one conclusion.

The speakers pure and simple "don't want them Natives around here."

The words were spoken at last week's public hearing on the land selections being made by Chugach Natives Inc., the regional corporation owned by and operated for the Natives who live in the Chugach region.

CNI is seeking to obtain the 379,000 acres of land promised it in the 1971 passage of ANSCA. But almost 10 years have gone by and CNI hasn't seen one acre of land.

A study group has been appointed to come up with recommended selections for Chugach. The group itself has had problems. First, the U.S. Forest Service has been less than cooperative in working out an agreement with CNI. That is nothing new. That happened during the first land claims battle and in subsequent battles.

Then CNI was told to look outside the traditional region because much of the region is taken up by state and federal land. They did so and then were criticized for looking only for land that has a high value. What did anyone expect? If CNI can't have the land that it formerly lived on, and if CNI has to look outside the region, only a fool would expect CNI to look at land that had no value.

Then comes the first public hearing in Cordova and, while the tenor of the hearing was more restrained than at the hearing last spring, the undercurrent was the same: "Okay, Natives, you can have your land but not here."

It is easy to understand the feelings of Cordova residents who feel they are being hemmed in by CNI and other Native village corporations. But there is more there than that.

And one statement summed it all up. We won't identify the person who said "Don't get me wrong. If a Native person were down on the street and needed (resuscitation) I'd put my mouth over his just like any other person."

And the other statement: "Let them have this land and pretty soon they'll be running everything."

As anyone who has watched the civil rights battles in the South and the land claims battles here knows, that statement underlines a problem that has a name that everybody knows: Prejudice and fear.

Cordova residents should remember that two of the largest employers in the community are Native owned. Numerous other businesses are Native owned.

So, Cordova residents, don't let fear do your thinking. Remember that the Natives were there and cherished the land long before any white man had entered the region.

They have been and always will be good neighbors.

They have never raped the land as people are alleging will happen. They were the original conservationists.

You will not be squeezed out of your land as the Natives once were squeezed out of theirs. The only thing you have to fear is fear itself. And fear must be conquered.