

New Bureaucracy Not the Answer

Would the transfer of Native education from the Bureau of Indian Affairs to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare mean the birth of a new bureaucracy?

This is the question in the minds of Alaskan representatives to the Senate Subcommittee hearings on education in Denver, Colo., this week.

Alaska's position is unique among the other states in that the federal government never made separate treaties with her Natives and the State Constitution makes the state responsible for the education of ALL her people.

Thus, legally, Alaska's Natives are not to be treated as aliens or an alien country, but rather, as citizens. To have a separate government agency administering to them, such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs, is unnecessary. As citizens, their problems should be handled the same as problems of other citizens in the state.

A few years ago the Indian Health hospitals in Alaska were transferred to the U. S. Public Health Service — almost. What happened was that the U. S. Public Health Service created an entirely new department, the Division of Indian Health, and transferred many of the personnel from the old department to the new department.

Thus, the problems didn't change, just the address. Is this what would happen if HEW took over Native education?

Would a new bureaucracy be formed or would the State of Alaska receive financial help from HEW to handle its own education problems?

The Natives of Alaska, through their own regional organizations and through the newly formed Statewide Native Organization, now have the vehicles to bring pressure for equal educational opportunities.

It would be hoped that these organizations will take a close look at the proposal to move the educational responsibility to HEW.

The federal Department of Education now administers programs which provide funds for certain students groups. It would seem that rather than forming a new department for Natives, hiring teachers and building schools, the federal Department of Education could continue its function as a dispenser of funds in the field of Native education.

If HEW would provide certain funds to the State of Alaska, then the state could fulfill its responsibility of educating ALL her citizens.

If HEW plans to set up a new department for Native education then it might be better to wait for another solution to a top-heavy bureaucracy that allows villages to go months without teachers, and in some instances, schools; that allows children to be shipped to other states for high school education; that allows mediocre teachers to fill some posts.

A new bureaucracy that would maintain all the segregated aspects of Native education is no answer to equal education opportunities.