

Office of Education Asked To Fund Native Education

The three-man Alaskan delegation to the federally sponsored Conference on Indian Education last week, voted to request the U. S. Office of Education to contract with the State of Alaska in providing funds for Native education.

The conference, held in Denver, Colo., was jointly sponsored by the Department of Interior and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the possible transfer of Native education from the Bureau of Indian Affairs to the Department of Health Education and Welfare (HEW).

Attending the conference from Alaska was Flore Lekanof, president of the Statewide Native Organization; Howard Rock, editor of the Tundra Times and William Hensley, recently elected state representative from Kotzebue.

"If the responsibility for Native education is transferred to HEW, we recommended that they provide funds to Alaska so the state could administer the education of Natives here like they administer the education of every other student," Lekanof said.

"This is providing the state gets good education administrators. With enough pressure exerted by the federation of Native organizations we can get a first class education for all the children in the state."

Lekanof said the Office of Education officials "received our proposal quite favorably."

"One official said Alaska could be treated separately from the other states because

(Continued on Page 8)

Office of Education Asked . . .

Continued from Page 1

there are no reservations here and because the state constitution makes the state responsible for the education of all its citizens.

"We told the conference delegates that the climate was right for the state to take over Native education and that the people were ready for a change.

"I kept emphasizing that the state should have jurisdiction over native education not just because we are dissatisfied with the BIA, which

we are, but for financial reasons also. One administration could do just as good a job as two separate administrations and do it more economically.

"In several states where there is a large population of Indians, the State Department of Education hires an Indian consultant. I think if Walter Hickel's idea of a Department of Native Affairs is adopted here it only stands to reason there should be a person of Native background involved in education."

Native leaders from all over the country attended the Denver meeting and the opinion or tribal leaders regarding the possible transfer of Native education to HEW was diversified.

Some of them favored the move while others thought the transfer might terminate other services on Indian reservations. Several thought their states were not willing or interested in becoming involved in Native education.

"The Indians there are not ready yet to get under equal educational basis," said Johnson Holy Rock of Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota.

Holy Rock based his opinion on alleged rampant discrimination against Indians in the Pine Ridge area. He said there was a case where white citizens would not allow their children to eat in school cafe-

terias where Indian cooks were employed.

Although a number of Indian tribal leaders gave positive credit to the BIA in their education of Indians, many of the delegates were critical of the agency.

Joe Moore of the Papago Indians said, "We have had 82 years to BIA education but in 1966 we still have no adequately educated Indians."

Dr. James Wilson, Oglala Sioux from Pine Ridge, S.D., presently with the Office of Economic Opportunity in Washington, D.C., thought the education of Indians should be transferred to HEW.

"In 82 years of BIA administration there has been only 15 college graduates out of 6,000 people. The past is one that speaks for itself."

Vine Deloria Jr., from Standing Rock, S.D., and executive director of the National Congress of American Indians, was outspoken in his evaluation of the BIA.

"The BIA has done a bad job - these guys are here as caretakers - and that's it."

The Office of Education has called a similar conference for this week in Portland, Ore. Attending this meeting will be Jules Wright, president of the Fairbanks Native Association and recently elected representative to the State Legislature.

Professional educators and Native leaders from California, Oregon, Washington, Alaska and Idaho will be attending this meeting.