

# Young Native Men Question Draft System

Young Native men in the bush areas of Alaska are challenging the federal selective system and its methods of operation in the remote, far-flung communities throughout the state.

Several men of draft age in the Bethel area are considering taking legal action which will focus attention on the unique problem involved in drafting men for the armed forces from the Native people.

Christopher Cooke, attorney for Alaska Legal Services in Bethel, explained some of the complexities inherent in the present system in a recent letter to the Tundra Times.

"In Alaska," said Cooke, "draft boards are located in four places: Nome, Fairbanks, Anchorage and Juneau. All the members of the draft boards live in those places. However, the territory covered by the jurisdiction of the draft board is the same as that of the State judicial districts.

In other words, the Nome draft board has jurisdiction over registrants from places like Barrow, Point Hope, Lower Yukon, and even Nunivak Island. Similarly, the Fairbanks draft board is the draft board for young people living in Bethel, Galena, and Barter Island. For people living in Atka, Unalaska or Dillingham, their draft board is in Anchorage.

"One 'right' that a selective service registrant has is the right to appear before his draft board to challenge any classification or explain in person to the board what reasons he has for wanting, for instance, a hardship deferment or conscientious objector status. This is called the right of personal appearance and is provided for in the draft law.

"For most bush residents the right of personal appearance is not much of a 'right' at all. To actually make personal appearance, village residents would have to travel often hundreds of miles at the expense of hundreds of dollars to the place the draft board meets.

"Of course, most village residents don't have this kind of money to travel or send individual members to the registrant's village to see what the conditions really are.

"From this fact alone a bush resident is not able to make

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as affective a case for hardship deferment or other deferment as could someone living in one of the major cities. Similarly, because all the draft board members come from cities, they might have limited understanding regarding the kinds of hardship which village families face when young men are called for military duty.

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"For instance they probably have less appreciation of the effort it takes to haul wood, haul water, pump oil, haul ice, fish, hunt, trap, and engage in other activities which are necessary to sustain village life.

"This office represents several young men of draft age who are faced with the situation that I have outlined above. They have requested deferments, but they are handicapped by the great distance between their homes and the place where the draft board meets.

"We expect an action will be filed very soon to challenge the way the draft board is set up which will seek to solve this particular problem and to restructure the draft boards in a way that will make them more accessible to the people of rural Alaska."