

# Apathy of Urban Natives in Politics

by SASHA

(Courtesy of Anchorage Daily News)

Thursday night there was a Native gathering over at the Carpenters Hall, and my friend Adam John gave a very good speech, which I would like to pass on here for the benefit of all those who were unable to attend the meeting.

"Just last week I took a sample list of 350 Natives, and after checking found out that 263 of them were not registered to vote. In other words, less than one-fourth could vote if the election were to be held tomorrow, and if this pattern is true over the entire city of Anchorage, it means that every politician can from now on ignore Native problems and Native voters.

"If we don't register, we can't vote. If we don't vote, then we lose the right to complain that the government is not sympathetic to us. Let's not make any mistake about what this is all about. If we don't vote, we are doing the same thing as signing a statement that says:

1. We as Natives don't care about land claims.
2. We as Natives oppose the right of Native fishermen to sell all of their fish at a fair price.
3. We as Natives oppose regional and local education for our children and support sending them away to Oregon and Oklahoma.
4. We as Natives refuse to accept compensation for the destruction of our game and land by the pipeline construction.

"If we don't vote, in effect we are voting for:

1. A President who continues sending our sons off to war.
2. A representative and a senator who refuse to help us obtain the benefits of federal programs, or support our land claims.
3. A governor who will oppose our needs and refuse to take note of our problems no matter how bad.
4. Local officials, including judges, mayors, school board members, and city councilmen who will gladly permit us to continue without transportation, decent housing, fair police protection, and adequate schools for our children.

"If all this comes true, then we better wake up now, and we better make sure not to complain if this does happen.

"One of the most common, and most erroneous objections to voting by individuals is that 'my vote doesn't count for very much.' If every Native felt that way, there wouldn't be much hope for our political future.

"But if every eligible Native does vote, we are the single largest bloc of votes in the state. We number roughly some 20 to 25 per cent of the voting population, and there is not a politician in the state of Alaska who can afford to ignore a voting bloc that large.

"In addition, what is really important is the election of Native people to public office. We ought to have at least 10 to 15 Native members in the Legislature, and we ought to have Native mayors and councilmen in every single village in the state. We ought to have right here in Anchorage—which is the largest Native village in Alaska—Natives on the City Council and the school board.

"In every single village in rural Alaska, we are slowly but surely seizing the benefits of political power. Things are changing. . . Kotzebue, Bethel, Barrow. . . Natives are in office, and you can FEEL the difference in spirit in those places. You feel alive and able to breathe.

"But not here in Anchorage. . . not in the Legislature, and not in our high offices. For those places, the Native voices are weak and powerless.

"But votes are powerful, and speak with loud voices. And whatever you say about politicians—no matter how intelligent, or ignorant—no matter how prejudiced or tolerant—no matter what—they all know how to count votes, or they don't get elected.

"Our job is to make them start counting Native votes—ALL OF THEM!"

I join with Adam John in urging every Native in Alaska to register and vote. This is the most critical year, politically, in all Alaska's brief history. Our very lives are at stake, and only by exercising our rights as citizens will we be able to direct the future of our land, and choose our destiny.