

From our Anchorage Bureau

## *I may not agree with a word you say*

The process of deciding where and how the public should be able to cross Native lands to reach public lands and facilities, is complicated at best. At worst, it's a nightmare.

Briefly, here is how easements are reserved for village land selections, based on the claims act, Secretarial Order 2982, and conversations with officials of the Bureau of Land Management and the Land Use Planning Commission:

Having received a village or regional land selection application, the BLM district office for the area holds a village meeting to discuss easements with the people to hear their views. District officers explain which government agencies, land owners or other interests have

requested easements and for what reasons.

The District Office then sends its information, including Native testimony, to the Easement Task Force. With observers from the Land Use Planning Commission and State of Alaska present, the Task Force reviews the material and prepares recommendations to the State Director as to where easements should be located.

After the State Director reviews the Task Force recommendations, he publishes a Notice of Proposed Easements. The public including Native, then has 45 days to comment on the easements and suggest changes. The Land Use Planning Commission and the state have 90 days to comment.

During this 90 day period,

the commission staff consults with village and regional leaders and returns its recommendations to the State Director. If changes have been made, the Task Force will be asked to review commission comments. If, after further discussion by the Task Force, the State Director and Commission still cannot agree, the package is sent the head of the BLM in Washington, D.C. for a final decision.

After the initial village meetings, there is only one formal opportunity for Natives to comment on easements for their village, people may propose changes or protest easements to the BLM right up to the time the Interim Conveyance for land is signed by the State Director.