

## Irresponsible Imagery

The public image of Native people which one gathers from press reports in national and state media these days is less than complimentary to our folks. In fact, the image is downright shabby. If one is to believe these reports, filed insensitively by wire services and splashed across the pages of leading national newspapers, and read casually by broadcast commentators to an audience of millions, it would lead the public to conclude that Alaska Eskimos, Indians and Aleuts were one of the most unsightly blights on the human race.

By some accounts, three out of every four Eskimos on the arctic slope are constantly falling-down drunk on an unending party paid for by limitless oil dollars. And our villagers are chronic users of such drugs as cocaine, a habit which they are paying for by exterminating the polar bear population. And Native villagers of the western Alaskan coast are recklessly slaughtering thousands of walrus for tusk ivory, such that our beaches are littered with the waste of rotting carcasses. And Eskimo whalers are responsible for the decline of the great bowhead whale population. And the Aleuts are murderously driving the fur seal population to the point of extinction. And, all the while, Natives are rolling in so much money that they don't know how to spend it.

Are Native people really like this? Are we so lacking in cultural pride and basic qualities of human kindness that we are thoughtlessly destroying ourselves and the wildlife resource which surrounds our villages? Of course not!

There are social problems which merit priority attention. Worthwhile community-based efforts are being made to address these social ills. Drug abuse, alcohol abuse in particular, is a major international disease affecting all of humanity. It is a great hypocrisy and a completely insensitive act for our non-Native neighbors to become so absorbed in the national and state press with social ills in Native communities.

What may be done about this injustice? We can do a number of things. We can examine the motives of public officials who single out an entire race of peoples as a target for irresponsible statements and make such persons accountable for the false distortions they present. We can respond swiftly and firmly to ignorant reporters who carelessly dispatch false reports to national and international audiences. We can encourage strong leadership which will not tolerate such abuses against Native citizens.

We have a great deal to be proud of — a rich cultural heritage and wonderful and beautiful lifestyles. Our ancestors have left us a legacy that no irresponsible public official nor ignorant reporter can't take away from us. We can show our pride and self-respect to the world, and hope that someday our human brothers and sisters will show us a little human sensitivity in return.