

# Will heads roll in the Alaska National Guard?

After four months of sharp, sometimes painful testimony by current and former members of the Alaska National Guard, a Board of Inquiry has issued its findings. The board established beyond doubt that racial bias is a pervasive, persistent problem in the ANG which has decimated the ranks of the acclaimed Eskimo Scouts and prevented the advancement of qualified Native officers.

We are grateful for the endless hours that the board put into its probe of allegations initially made public by an independent investigator from Washington, D.C. By definition, dealing with racial discrimination is a complicated and often thankless job. We feel the recommendations made by the Board of Inquiry to rectify some of the problems in education, cultural sensitivity, and communications which led to the discrimination should receive serious consideration.

It remains to be seen whether the Board of Inquiry's efforts will provide badly needed closure on the issue of race discrimination in the Guard. We fear it will not. First, some of the Board's recommendations require investment in structural improvements to make the Guard a more diverse and more socially responsible organization. The Legislature has not been too sympathetic to social investment. Second, it appears to us that the Board of Inquiry may have ignored some important aspects of the discrimination issue raised by Guard members. Finally, despite substantial testimony that certain individuals with faces, names, ranks and serial numbers were largely responsible for some of the most egregious expressions of racial bias, it appears that no heads will roll.

We are certainly not out for blood and the consequences of punitive actions always be carefully weighed. Military and political leaders always walk a very thin line between the perceived need for appropriate punishment and the risk of being held hostage to victims of wrongdoing beyond the point of reason. Based on comments made by top Guard brass, we are concerned that failing to hold top officers linked to discriminatory policies and practices accountable for their actions could have serious implications.

Especially when we are dealing with institutionalized racism and sexism, we must be prepared to send an unequivocal signal that discrimination in our public organizations is simply not negotiable.

As we analyze and report further on the findings of the board and its recommendations, we will speak further on this matter. We welcome the reactions of our readers to the findings of the Board of Inquiry, as well.