

Minority Politics and Native Power

(An Account of Emil Notti's Race for Secretary of State)

(Editor's Note: The following comments were submitted to the Tundra Times by John Havelock, a 38-year-old Anchorage attorney who managed the Emil Notti campaign. He also writes a regular Sunday column for the Anchorage News. The Tundra Times was unable to print his 10½ page statement in full due to a lack of space.)

This article is a report on how Emil Notti's race for Secretary of State went and what the

results mean for the interest of Native people.

There were many substantial handicaps to the Emil Notti campaign.

The campaign got a late start because Emil Notti was a reluctant candidate, stepping in only when it was clear no other Native leader would take up the challenge.

The most severe handicap was a lack of money. The decision was made to plunge most of the money into a statewide mailer leaving little for traveling and for radio ads and none for television advertising.

Emil Notti lost the election but in doing so he made a showing which stunned regular followers of Alaska politics.

Red Boucher won the nomination with a vote of 14,704. Emil Notti came in second with 12,759, beating Chuck Sassara by over 2,000 votes.

The taste of defeat is never sweet but in defeat, Emil Notti pulled off an astonishing political feat.

What was the source of Notti strength? The answer comes easily to the lips: the Native vote. Wrong. And this is where the lesson for the Native people begins.

The total Native vote for candidates of both parties in the primary race is estimated at about 11,000. Using the election return data and the census data that is available, the evidence is convincing that Emil Notti's vote from Native people did not exceed 6,800.

The native in Alaska is a member of a minority and as such a member should use a certain style for getting things done. That style includes: first, use of "leverage", and second, "coalition politics."

Leverage is making the most of what you have.

The 65 per cent showed there is an unmistakable Native vote but for maximum leverage that vote must go to 85 or 90 per cent.

The Native must use party lines not be fooled by them. Native people must go back and forth across party lines seeking the maximum advantage.

Leverage means making the most of the primary system.

The second principle of minority politics is coalition power.

The Native people must throw in their lot with other minorities who have a similar stake in the future. The Native interest is in building a majority coalition for change.

Perhaps the first partner for the Native people should be the youth of the State. The young have been stimulated to demand change by their unique recognition of the moral duty of the society to give justice to oppressed or disadvantaged minorities.

Whatever their age, the black and other racial minorities of Alaska are usually of similar mind and have similar interests.

Poverty knows no color line. The non-Native poor are naturally allied with Native aspirations.

The conservationists are in sympathy with the Native desire to live in balance with nature and not to tear up the countryside.

The Native movement is the logical force to provide the leadership and discipline which will overcome the frustration from political ineffectiveness faced by the minorities.

The steps to be taken are: First, increased political education from top to bottom. Know who the true friends of the Native people are. Make sure the word gets out to all of the people.

Second, respect your leadership. It is inevitable that differences of opinion will arise as to who is the best candidate. A decision must be made and once it is made it must be followed, even if you feel it was wrong, or the leverage will be lost. Group solidarity is more important than any personal opinion.

The native leadership throughout the State is organizing a political education committee called Alaska Native Political Education Committee (ANPEC).

There was criticism of ANPEC's action in the primary. Some of it was deserved. Some was not. The most just criticism was that ANPEC acted too fast before people knew about the organization.

It was wrong to criticize ANPEC for making endorsements in a primary. Primary endorsements give the best chance of getting the kinds of officeholders you want.

While this essay has spoken of the mechanics of establishing political influence, the People should not lose sight of justice in the search for power. When the day comes, and it shall, when the Native people share fully in their entitlements of power and influence in the State of Alaska, I hope they will remember the taste of injustice and not abuse their power as some who now hold power have done.