

STUDY ASKS GOVT. AGENCIES FOR INCREASED NATIVE HIRE

Now But One-Tenth Of 14,000 Federal Workers are Native

"This staff study describes how federal agencies can increase employment opportunities for Alaska's Natives and is but one of several efforts of the Federal Field Committee aimed at developing policy suggestions which would contribute to an improvement of those circumstances under which Alaska's largest and most disadvantaged minority lives."

Thus states the staff study entitled, ALASKA NATIVES AND FEDERAL HIRE, authored by Robert D. Arnold and Esther G. Wunnicke for the Federal Field Committee for Development Planning in Alaska with field offices in Anchorage, Alaska.

The 77-page study is in the process of being reviewed by the President's Review Committee for Development Planning in Alaska in Washington, D. C.

"The Federal Field Committee," the study continued, "fully endorses this staff study for it believes that, by

providing job and training opportunities, federal agencies can make an important contribution to the advancement of the Alaska Natives and at the same time meet their needs for a stable work force."

The study stressed the fact that the federal government is the largest employer in Alaska with more than 14,000 workers on its rolls but that fewer than one federal employee of ten is an Alaska Native.

"Eskimos, Indians, and Aleuts make up more than one-fifth of Alaska's civilian population, but they hold fewer than one-tenth of the jobs in the state. Their unemployment rate—based upon a labor force estimated at about 16,500—is a staggering 60 per cent," the staff study said. "Being jobless, these Alaska Natives live in poverty and suffer its consequences."

The report also stressed that if more native people

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Asks More Native Hire . . .

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were employed by the federal government in Alaska, it would mean reduction of enormous cost of transporting new employees and their household goods from other states to Alaska.

These costs have been estimated to average \$2,500 for each new employee and another \$2,500 to return the employee to his point of hire in other states.

"Another cost of outside recruitment: about \$1 million spent each year for employees who continue on duty in Alaska but who receive re-employment leave travel benefits, popularly known as 'home leave,'" the staff study added.

It went on to say that as more native people are employed, there should be a decrease in the level of welfare assistance, which is now nearly \$2 million a year, going to the native persons who are marginally or seasonally employed.

LACK OF EDUCATION

The staff study also points out that although the native employment is low in Alaska, it should not be seen as evidence of discrimination by government agencies, that this is very unlikely.

"It is, instead," the study stated, "the result of a combination of factors difficult to readily overcome: most Natives are not only from cultures markedly different from those of other Americans, but they are also less well educated and trained, they live remote from principal job markets, and they lack knowledge of where jobs do exist."

"Further, the agencies may be unable to locate those Native persons who are seeking jobs."

The study continued that while most adult Alaskans who are not native have a high school education or better, most adult native Alaskans have less than a sixth-grade education.

Though the authors hoped that educational gains have been made by native people since 1960, the following figures from that year show that of 25 years old or older, and nearly all of whom are native persons, that almost 21 per cent were without schooling;

Almost 25 per cent had completed no more than the fourth grade; about 15 per cent had completed the fifth or sixth grade; less than eleven per cent had completed the eighth grade; only nine per cent had completed high school; and only 9/10 of one per cent had completed college.

"Maximum levels of federal employment of Natives may not be realized until adult basic education and vocational training programs are expanded," Bob Arnold and his co-author stated.

They noted that as skill levels of adult native peoples rise, increasing migration occurs to places where jobs are but that substantial gains can be made.

Native high school student ratio has tripled in the past ten years while the population has increased only 20 per cent. There are 17 times as many natives enrolled in some kind of post-high school education as there were ten years ago.

One fourth of the native population now lives in urban areas and that fraction is growing, the study said.

NATIVES AS EMPLOYEES

"Anyone who asserts that

Natives are unreliable ('they leave when the fishing season begins') or that they have a drinking problem ('they get a paycheck and that's the last you see of them') is engaging in the most hurtful kind of stereotyping," the study pointed out.

"Some Natives are unreliable—just as some non-Natives are, and some Natives have drinking problems—just as some non-Natives do, but what is true of some Natives or non-Natives is not true of all."

While remembering that cultural stereotypes are to be avoided, cultural differences should be remembered, the staff study states. Native persons coming to a point of employment from their accustomed life of subsistence hunting and fishing will probably not have ideal worker attributes on the first day or even for a month.

But if the new employee is essentially suited to the job and acceptable to the agency, the agency should provide counseling.

The study also points out that most native people employed by the federal government are in the lower level jobs—laborers, building maintenance men, mess attendants.

But there are also others who hold positions such as meteorological or cartographic technicians, licensed practical nurses, clerk typists. Some hold positions that require much skill and responsibility such as teachers, airplane pilots, employment assistance and tribal relations officers.

Pay grades range to GS-13—an annual salary level of \$15,113 plus a 25 per cent cost of living allowance.

Following are favorable testimony regarding Alaska natives as federal employees:

Carl Melton, Area Manager, Federal Aviation Administration, wrote to Ernest Nylin, village council president, Elim, Alaska, "Reflecting the past, we have hired people from Moses Point and have been most satisfied with their work accomplishments."

A spokesman for the Air Force:

"The Air Force has found Alaska Natives to be industrious and dependable workers. They are especially well suited for jobs requiring manual dexterity. They use imagination and basic ingenuity to accomplish work and overcome obstacles."

Burton W. Silcock, State Director of the Bureau of Land Management, said:

"During the past two years I've had the opportunity to observe Native Alaskans working on a permanent or temporary basis for the Bureau of Land Management in the following categories: cartographic draftsmen, secretaries, aircraft mechanics, electronic communications design and maintenance men, forest fire control men, and engineering aides. In all instances, the employees have performed in a commendable manner. In all cases they have conscientiously carried out duties assigned."

"Just as all Natives are not bad employees," the study points out, "neither are they all good—any more than any other person. What is necessary is only this: selection of the employee on the basis of what he, as an individual, can do."

CIVIL SERVICE

"Job vacancies that occur in the federal service to be filled by appointment of new persons to the service are most commonly filled by selection from registers of eligible persons maintained by the Interagency Board of Civil Service Examiners and established on the basis of open competitive examinations," the authors stated.

"Owing to a combination of factors in Native Alaska, this merit system—which is aimed at insuring equal federal employment opportunities to all citizens—if full of obstacles to increased federal employment of Alaska Natives.

"To be considered for appointment by most agencies of the federal government, a job seeker must be on the appropriate register of eligibles and, for improved chances of selection, be available for interview by hiring officers."

"If he is to be offered a job, he must rank as one of the top three eligible applicants referred to an agency for consideration."

The study then pointed out that there were exceptions to the Civil Service system that apply in Alaska, and these are: that the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Public Health Service and the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries have excepted authority to hire native people.

The explicit example of this authority is one of the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries that states: "The Native inhabitants of the islands shall be employed."

The directive applies to the people of Pribilof Islands who are the main work force in the sealing operation of the BCF.

OBSTACLE

"How the merit system—the use of a job register—is obstacle—full for Alaska Natives is suggested by a review of the steps necessary to getting on a register and to being appointed from it," the study said.

"A federal job seeker must: know, first of all, when an open competitive examination is being offered for a specific job category; meet the minimum qualifications in education and experience described in the announcement;

"Obtain, complete, and file a Standard Form 57 and CSC5000AB or 5001BC with the Office of the Interagency Board nearest him (in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Kodiak, Juneau, or Adak):

"Take, under authorized supervision, a written or performance test (unless the specific register is based upon experience only); and, achieve a rating based upon his test grades, experience, and education sufficiently high to get on the register and meet suitability requirements; have veterans' preference for added opportunity.

"Then to be appointed to a job—whether from a register or under an agency's excepted authority—the job seeker must: for improved chances of selection be available in the locality in which the job exists for an interview by a hiring officer;

"If acceptable to the hiring officer, obtain and pass a physical examination and meet security requirements; and, travel—not at the hiring agency's expense—to the job location and report

for work."

In a footnote, the authors pointed out that "federal agencies in Alaska may pay transportation costs of employees recruited in other states, but may not pay such costs for employees recruited in Alaska."

"The result is recruitment by some agencies for employees outside of Alaska even though a high level of unemployment exists within the state."

(NEXT WEEK: The Role of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in native employment, affirmative action programs, and recommendations.)