

SCHOOL \$\$\$ BEING MISUSED?

Committee Claims

Federal Funds Not

Meant For Boarding

A committee under the auspices of the Alaska Federation of Natives, appointed to make recommendations for the distribution of Johnson-O'Malley education funds for Alaska, has voted not to allow those funds to be used for the State Boarding Home and dormitory programs.

The committee vetoed the funding on the premise that such use of Johnson-O'Malley funds violated the intent of the Act under which they were appropriated.

Members of the Johnson-O'Malley Advisory Committee are: Marlene Johnson, Hoonah,

Fred Zaroff, Kodiak; Susan Murphy, Bethel; Mary Jane Lute, Fairbanks; Nettie Peratorovich, Anchorage; Robert Clark, Dillingham; James LaBelle, Anchorage; Penny Mendenhall, Nome; Lanta Phillips, Copper River; Grant Ballot, Kotzebue; Andrew Koso, Anchorage; and Brenda Iita, Anchorage.

"Johnson-O'Malley is supplement money," commented Superintendent of State Operated Schools, Stan Friese. "It cannot be used to replace or to fund regular school programs. So the question arises: Should Johnson-O'Malley funds go into that (the Boarding Home and dormitory programs) or should the State support that?"

Friese said SOS was in the process of assuming the Board

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Committee Claims . . .

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ing Home Program when he heard of the committee's decision.

"It looked like we were about to pick up a program that was going to lose 90 per cent of its funding."

The program has been run in the past by the State Department of Education, and relied heavily on Johnson-O'Malley funding. Last year's costs ran in the neighborhood of \$4½ million, with only about \$300,000 coming from the State of Alaska's general fund and the balance from Johnson-O'Malley.

"SOS has not relied heavily on Johnson-O'Malley," said Friese. "Of the total SOS budget of about \$35 million for last year's operation of the widespread rural school system, only about \$400,000 came from Johnson-O'Malley."

The SOS budget for the coming year is about \$40 million.

Does the state have the money to fund the Boarding Home and dormitory programs if that is the ultimate decision?

"It doesn't," Friese answered. "It is liable to cost all the districts in Alaska money."

Native leaders have complained that the State of Alaska has historically misused Johnson-O'Malley funds, which were appropriated to meet special needs of Indian children, over and above the basic education needs provided by the State.

Commented Friese, "With that kind of money you can really enrich the educational system. If the state is funding the basics."

Over all the hubub hangs a landmark lawsuit filed on behalf of a native student, Molly Hootch. The suit points up the state's obligation to provide a secondary education to every child in the State of Alaska within the community in which that student resides.

The issue, which is perhaps more of a pocketbook issue for the State than one of recognizing legal and moral obligation, has become a focal point for the crisis in the State's delivery system of upper education in rural areas.

Friese foresees that the Boarding Home and Boarding School programs will diminish as regional high schools are built in remote areas. "But I don't think that means the need for these programs will disappear altogether," he added.

"I am not ready to admit that the small village high school of three to five students is the complete answer. It's quite a complicated program in Alaska. How do you provide secondary education in every community?"

Senator John Sackett believes that under the State Constitution, the State will be forced to allocate funding for school construction in rural areas.

Sackett anticipates a fight in the next legislature on establishing the priority of education as one of the state's top needs.

He sees the job of the Legislature as one of continuing what was initiated in the last session. Finding a method of going toward local control," he stated. "The next action then would be rural school construction, and from there you go down to curriculum."

The issue of rural education in Alaska became a key issue in the last legislature, where a bill was introduced to abolish SOS altogether and institute local control. After much discussion, it was held over for the next legislative session with two interim committees appointed to study the problems and report back in January.

U.S. Senator Henry M. Jackson, in introducing the Indian Self-Determination and Educational Reform Act in February of this year, commented on the Johnson-O'Malley Act. The bill is still pending before Congress.

"In the past few years," states Sen. Jackson, "some major questions and criticisms have evolved regarding administrative policy of the BIA in implementing the Johnson-O'Malley Act and the use or misuse of such funds by the local public school districts."

"The vagueness and ambiguity of the Act has resulted in varied and inconsistent administrative procedures within the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the State education agencies, and the local school districts. The absence of a clear concise policy which defines compliance and programmatic responsibility of the school districts in administering these programs has produced a long history of inefficient and ineffective programs which have not met the special needs of Indian children."

"The last decade," observes Jackson, "has seen an increased demand from Indian people for more involvement in the decisions which affect their lives and the lives of their children. Presently, there is great concern and dissatisfaction in local Indian communities regarding the misuse and inadequacies of Johnson-O'Malley programs and the lack of Indian participation."

The Alaska Federation of Natives Review Committee for Johnson-O'Malley funds in the State of Alaska came into being only in June. Clearly, however, they have already begun to evidence the concerns of which Jackson speaks.

The Department of Education must reassess what are the state's responsibilities under Constitutional law. In the meantime a \$4½ million dollar tab for the complex State Boarding Home and dormitory school programs lies on the table, waiting for someone to pick it up.