

AFN seeks BIA leadership shift

A new president in the White House and pressure from Alaska Natives could cause a change of leadership in the Bureau of Indian Affairs Juneau Area Office.

Although they asked not to be identified, two sources connected with the Alaska Federation of Natives Human Resources Committee said last week that the committee had voted unanimously to recommend the replacement or reassignment of Area Director Clarence Antioquia.

Antioquia told the Tundra Times he had not had any communication from the committee regarding their recommendation. He added that with a change of administration there are often changes of policy and personnel, but he said, "We don't have any idea what those will be."

Members of the Human Resources Committee met in Washington, D.C. January 22 with

Senator Mike Gravel to discuss problems Alaska Native groups are having in implementing the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. The act is intended to make it easier for Native groups to contract with federal agencies to run programs for Native people. The committee is made up of representatives of the 12 non-profit regional Native corporations who deliver Social Services to Natives.

For months, Native leaders have stewed over problems they have had in contracting with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Although some would not specifically confirm that they would ask for the Area Director's replacement, all were vocal in denouncing the Area Office for working against Indian self-determination.

Frank Peterson, director of the Kokiak Area Native Association stated, "The Area Office to a large degree acts like mini-

gods. They leave very little leeway or flexibility in the interpretation of the regulations (governing the act)." He also said the Area Office had trouble communicating with the regions.

Concerning Antioquia, Peter-

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Replacement ...

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son said, "There was consideration at the Human Resources Committee meeting of asking for the replacement of the area director. I presume there will be a formal resolution."

Carl Jack, executive director of Yupiktak Bista, Inc., non-profit corporation for the Bethel area, said although the self-determination act was supposed to make it easier for Natives to run their own programs, the BIA has "made it harder than before to contract." He said the area office had misused its discretionary powers to block self-determination.

"You practically have to fight tooth and nail all the way with the Area Office," Jack said.

Mitch Dementieff, executive vice-president of the Tanana Chiefs Conference, was not present at the Human Resources Committee meeting but said he had heard the committee would call for Antioquia's replacement or reassignment. Tanana Chiefs, in a letter sent January 25, asked Senator Gravel to request the Comptroller General of the United States "to conduct a full scale audit of the Juneau Area Office, paying particular attention to the distribution and uses of funds which have either been contracted to Native organizations already or which in theory should be available for contracting to Native organizations under the Indian Self-Determination Act."

The letter also stated, "We believe the Area Office, under its present Director, is working actively against the policy of self determination established by Congress." Dementieff accused the Area office of trying to discourage Native contracting and downgrade the quality of social service programs for Natives.

Antioquia acknowledged there had been "a lot of problems" in setting up contracting procedures and he expressed no alarm that Native groups in Alaska would make their frustrations known to the new administration.

During its Washington meeting, the Human Resources Committee took other steps aimed toward improving the contracting situation.

One of the major difficulties in implementing the self-determination act has been the definition of tribe and tribal group. The definition is critical because it is supposed to guide government agencies in deciding what Native groups are eligible to manage programs.

The problem in Alaska has been that BIA requires Native groups, such as a non-profit regional corporation, to obtain resolutions from all other tribal organizations in its area, such as an I.R.A. village council, stating that they do not object to receiving services from the regional association. Native leaders com-

plain that this creates more work for everybody and is "inefficient and expensive."

Senator Gravel has agreed to work to change the existing language to eliminate some of red tape. Native regional associations appear close to agreeing on a revised tribal concept which would speed up contracting to deliver government social services. This concept, as explained by several members of the Human Resources Committee, would be as follows:

Non-profit Native corporations/associations would be recognized as regional tribes that "derive their powers from the villages." These groups, would seek to contract with the federal government agencies to deliver social services to Natives. If any village, village council, or other organization in the region objects to receiving services from the regional group, they will be excluded from the contract. They then may contract directly with the government to provide services to their people or continue receiving services from the federal agency.
