

WIDELY USED PER DIEM EYED

Informal Survey by TT Indicates Bush Doesn't Get Benefit

By LAEL MORGAN

What happens to government per diem money? According to the rule books, it's supposed to cover the expenses of bureaucratic traveling on government business but an informal Tundra Times survey of the bush leads us to suspect the money too often ends up in the pocket of the bureaucrat instead of that of the villager who feeds and houses him.

In the Alaskan bush, hotels and restaurants are rare and visitors must seek lodging with local families.

The hospitality of Alaska's Eskimos, Indians and Aleuts isn't lavish because, on the whole, their homes are modest and so are their grocery budgets, but they tend to do their best by guests.

Yet following in the wake of visiting government officials recently, I was surprised to learn from families that lodged them that many civil servants had not offered to pay board or had paid only token amounts.

"Our salaries aren't big and I thought per diem was just sort of a supplement to them," a young welfare agent explained to me in good faith. "That's what the man who had the job before me said. He never paid anything to families he stayed with."

"When people come to our office from the Anchorage office, they bring their sleeping bags and insist on sleeping on our office floor rather than going to the local hotel," complained a state employee who manages an Arctic outpost. "They just camp out under our feet and stick all that per diem in their pockets. It's a real rip-off!"

It is indeed! According to the new state schedule, traveling employees are entitled to \$47 per day when in Galena, Tanana and McGrath areas.

That also goes for Barrow,

Kotzebue and Ft. Yukon. Those visiting other areas receive slightly less, but the minimum is \$35 per day for short-term visits.

And the federal employee is even better heeled. A day rate of \$52 is allowed for those doing business in the Nome, Kotzebue and Galena areas.

Federal men in Prudhoe Bay receive \$82 per day for expenses and the going rate in Dead Horse is \$64. The lowest rate for the feds is \$8.30 for Adak, a military installation with a low rate BOQ, but the minimum elsewhere in Alaska is \$32 per day.

Native regional corporations tend to keep their per diem on a par with state scale or under and some Native leaders are having second thoughts about that.

The modern hotel at Kotzebue charges \$29.36 per day and the Travelers in Fairbanks has a

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minimum commercial rate of \$33.50, but modest bush accommodations are much less.

For example Albert Com-mack charges \$8 for a warm bunk at his Shungnak Trading Post and you can rent a room from the Kivalina store at \$10 a night. Those staying with families in Arctic regions pay from \$4 to \$10 a night and \$15 if meals are included.

"Our per diem has been \$35 for town and \$25 in villages but it's going down to \$15 for all villages," reports John Sackett, president of the Doyon Regional Corporation.

"That's low but at least it does get to the villagers who take care of our people. We insist our people pay subsistence."