

# Conference stresses village control and action

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Tundra Times

Delegates to RurAL CAP's Village Participation Conference passed resolutions calling upon the state to recognize tri-

bal governments, keep the permanent fund dividend intact, and raise the minimum drinking age. Other resolutions opposed the closure of Mount Edgecumbe High School, and

supported the formation of two time zones for Alaska. Delegates from 64 villages attended the conference held March 29-31 in Juneau.

With the mechanics to be worked through by RurAL CAP, workshop representatives will follow through on their ideas and participate in pre-planning with their workshoping. A statewide action committee will be mobilized by means of teleconferencing.

"We will use personal representation when we can't accomplish what we want by teleconferencing," said Conference Chairman, Sheldon Katchatag of Unalakleet.

Reflecting on the conference, Bob Lohr, Executive Director of RurAL CAP, said "what is most exciting to RurAL CAP is the local control and action — community action. This is what our organization is supposed to be about."

One of the most significant aspects of the conference, Lohr said, was the state announcement that unincorporated communities in the unorganized borough IRA and Native Traditional Village Councils would be recognized and dealt with in good faith by the state.

Explaining what took place at the local government work-

shop, Jeff Smith, the new director of the Division of Local Government Assistance in the Department of Community and Regional Affairs, said that the basic policy shift in this administration is its openness to discussion and that it wants to come up with solutions that the state and the villages can live with.

"We are going to go in and deal with communities as they are, not as we wish they were," Smith said.

Smith explained that the past administration had finally determined that federally-chartered IRAs could waive sovereign immunity for specific purposes and not long ago had agreed to deal with them. Traditional councils, he explained, are not federally-chartered and the state's relationship to them is ambivalent, dealing with them in some instances and not in others.

"We encourage the formation of incorporated communities," Smith said. "We think incorporation is a benefit to the community and we are trying to indicate what local government can do for a community."

"However," he continued, "if residents of that area are not ready to form a municipal government, it is the policy of this government and the Department to relate to that community as they are organized."

"As soon as the legislature goes out of session, I think you will see some initiatives coming from this Department," he predicted.

Student participants, who held their own workshop fo-

cusing on village basic needs, schools, and alcoholism and drug abuse, included 12th graders Harold John of Aniak and Meranda Murphy of Mentasta Lake. Also, Patrick Lake, Hooper Bay, 11th grade; Bessi Senungetuk, Shishmaref, 10th grade; James Kvasnikoff, English Bay and Abraham Kowunna, Point Hope, both in the 9th grade, and Clide Isaac Frankson, Point Hope, 8th grade.

For two days each workshop defined and discussed specific village problems and developed proposed solutions which identified what villages can do to solve each respective issue and what action the state may need to take. The sense of the workshop recommendations were incorporated into resolutions which, on the third day of the conference, were discussed and voted upon by all delegates.

The resolutions adopted by the full conference are summarized below.

## Local Government

The Sheffield Administration's policy as expressed by the Department of Community and Regional Affairs, recognizing IRA Councils where they are the only form of government in a village, is endorsed and should be incorporated into statute.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs in the Department of Interior and Self-Determination Act contractors need better communication with IRA and Traditional Councils and the Department of Interior should expedite processing and ap-

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# Village participation conference resolutions

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proval of applications for IRA Council status.

The state should appropriate funds to provide minimum basic services — safe water and sewer systems, fire and police protection, and adequate health care delivery systems — to all residents with provision for local input.

Funding of the state Rural Development Council should be continued and, if federal funding of the Legal Services Corporation is cut, the state should assure its continuation. Any changes or amendments to the Permanent Fund Dividend Program are opposed.

People in rural areas should be able to qualify for home and business loans on an equitable basis with urban areas. The legislative "Bush Caucus" is commended for its work and concern for rural Alaska.

Two time zones in the state are supported. Continuation of state aid to unincorporated communities outside of organized boroughs is sup-

ported but funding should also be provided to unincorporated communities within organized boroughs.

## **Alcohol/Drug Abuse:**

Proposed measures restoring the legal minimum drinking age to 21, increasing the excise tax on alcohol, and providing for increased penalties for persons convicted of driving while intoxicated are supported. Full funding for alcohol and drug abuse programs at a level at least equal to 1983 is supported for next year.

## **Health and Safety**

The Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) program is an appropriate model that gives safety support and services in isolated rural communities. Funding for the training and establishment of VPSOs is supported for every rural community which requests it.

## **Economic Development**

Participants felt that development in the rural areas needs

to concentrate on existing local industries. A maximum amount of local control over development needs to be maintained so as not to endanger the cultural heritage of Native Alaskans. City and Village Councils were urged to demand adequate planning and to pass ordinances for local hire and public works.

## **Transportation**

Workshop participants agreed that transportation is a lifeline to rural Alaskan communities. Increased local participation in planning improvements and in administering public works projects was considered. In particular, legislation was supported to increase state revenue sharing road maintenance from \$2,500 to \$3,500 a mile.

## **Energy/Housing**

The main concerns of workshop participants were the improvement of the quality of housing in rural areas, the need for cheaper fuel for use within rural Alaska as well as reason-

able cost alternative energy projects, and local input and involvement in projects. Also, top-level recognition of the economic interests of village energy consumers is required. Transfer of alternative energy and engineering programs and the bulk fuel loan program from the Department of Commerce to the Department of Community and Regional Affairs were recommended. Additionally, combining of federal and state weatherization programs was recommended. There were, however, no resolutions from this workshop.

## **Education**

Closure of Mt. Edgecumbe School is opposed. Continued federal funding is urged and the governor is requested to support efforts to maintain the facility as an Alaska Native Boarding High School. Calling local people who do actual bilingual teaching "aides" is deplored.

The Department of Educa-

tion is urged to redefine certification requirements to include bilingual fluency, pride in culture, and knowledge of local life style and is urged to provide training programs at the local level for bilingual teachers.

State funds should be appropriated for University of Alaska dormitories as the cost of a school residence is prohibitive to most rural families, and money for housing assistance should be provided to students until the dormitories are available for residency.

## **Natural Resources**

Support of the subsistence law has been affirmed by the Alaska voters and it should be protected against any amendment action. Priority issues pertaining to subsistence life style which should be addressed include: information on Bering Sea oil leases; fishing loan programs; limited entry permits for local residents; depletion of game supply by outside hunters.