

# Peltola Calls for Programs to Prepare College Students



AVCP President Gene Peltola

*This article was originally an address by AVCP President Gene Peltola to the University of Alaska Regents given when they visited Bethel in early January.*

On behalf of Kuskokwim Community College Council and the Association of Village Council Presidents, I welcome the leadership of the University of Alaska and Community Colleges to Bethel and wish all of you a healthy and prosperous New Year. As AVCP and KCC are blessed with a Russian Orthodox constituency, I am also privileged to wish you a Merry Christmas. 1986 is a major and critical time for the University, for community colleges and for the State of Alaska.

The University and nonprofit organizations such as AVCP are similarly facing challenges of declining state and federal revenues. We must consider the effects of this situation on our institutions and pay careful attention to our goals and objectives in view of the competition for limited financial resources. Rural-based institutions must also be attentive to divisiveness presently among Alaskans and the reduced ability of rural Alaska and Alaska Natives to influence state policy due to urban population growth in the 1980's.

Postsecondary institutions and Native organizations have a common goal of developing trained Native leadership to meet the challenges of 1991. Native communities need com-

petent and accountable management to preserve and enhance our land and resources for the benefit of current and future generations. The University is embarking on a six-year plan which will establish general directions through 1991. Native people and educators need to act now in a concerted manner and find ways to overcome regional differences and to share our talents and resources to meet the challenges before us. We can no longer afford to "do our own thing" however we must continue to maintain the degree of local control and autonomy that is equally necessary for success.

Your conference is particularly timely. In yesterday evening's news, we heard the State Senator from Anchorage, who is co-chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, state that

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*"...More Native involvement is needed to design courses of study relevant to local needs..."*

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the university should close those campuses that are not "cost-efficient." For myself, I don't know how to define efficiency when it comes to higher educational opportunities for village students. While I don't want to see any education institution closed because of the state's budget crunch, I do believe it is appropriate to review university programs to eval-

uate education success and ability to meet identified local needs. The University, KCC, AVCP and our member communities need to cooperatively consider what is necessary to meet unique needs of rural residents, along with the members of the Rural Education Task Force. Priorities among education programs need to be better established.

Curriculum planning needs attention. Native community and regional involvement is more needed to design courses of study relevant to career opportunities and local needs. For example, AVCP, in recruiting for a biologist for our natural resources program, could not identify a Native within the university system who will be graduated with a biology degree until 1989. Our rural economy has its limitations, however wildlife management expertise will be a major requirement in the AVCP region for many years. Education opportunities need to be more attentive to career opportunities in the rural workplace.

Cooperative management among our respective institutions needs to be developed. Universities and community colleges should be cooperatively planning with nonprofits such as AVCP for rural work force needs. We need, for example, trained Natives to become corrections officers, probation officers, social workers, teachers, and public safety officers. We need to be practical in designing education programs, such that education is tailored on a project basis to enable Native students to meet educational qualifications of identified work force needs in their home communities. Of we take this approach, AVCP can contribute money and personnel to cooperatively work with educators toward specific objectives.

AVCP and similar nonprofit organizations have an investment in the university system. AVCP is presently providing scholarship funds for approximately 130 students enrolled in

university campuses. Our university system will be cost-efficient if we are able to design and implement education programs which permit these young people to return to their home communities to enter the work force and contribute to the benefit of their villages, our regions, and the Alaskan society. Welcome to Bethel, KCC, and the AVCP Region. We wish you success in your deliberations.