

Hartman Prefers Smaller High Schools in Rural Areas

"I don't like to see kids go too far away to school, especially at the ninth and tenth grade levels," announced acting commissioner of education Dr. Clifford R. Hartman to the Tanana

Chiefs' Conference last Friday.

Hartman continued that he preferred to have more, smaller high schools up to the tenth grade level, with students then having the opportunity to transfer to consolidated high schools for preparation for college or for vocational education. Graduation from the smaller schools would also be possible.

Hartman was one of many State and Federal officials who spoke to the Chiefs in Tanana. In addition to education, they covered health, communications, rural

development, fish and game, and land.

The formal talks were followed by lively question periods—in one case, a BIA official not only agreed that a Native complaint about welfare was valid, but asked the Natives to apply pressure to help officials make changes.

The discussions stretched the program out until the delegates finally re-elected last year's slate of officers so that they could catch the plane from Tanana.

In addition, there was no time

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for final debate on nine resolutions accepted by the conference. Almost all had been brought up earlier in the conference, however, and attorneys helped with the wording in several cases.

Delegates passed a motion asking that the next conference be three days long, and gave informal approval of a plan to hold a meeting in the fall to prepare resolutions for the next legislative session.

The meeting ran into some early problems when only one officer—Ralph Perdue—was able to attend. President John Sackett was in Juneau for the closing of the State Legislature—which also kept the featured speaker, Alaska secretary of state Keith Miller, from attending.

The first subject presented was health problems in the villages. This was presented by Dr. Wherritt of the Native Health Service and Dr. Lauster of the Public Health Service.

Dr. Wherritt stated that the biggest problem was to provide total health service in 200 villages scattered all over Alaska with a limited staff.

At present, his organization can provide an average of two visits a year for a doctor, and three to four visits for a nurse, in each village. Smaller villages get fewer visits, and larger ones get more.

However, people get sick every day of the year. To provide better health services, Dr. Wherritt said that action was being taken in three areas—treatment, prevention, and treatment of chronic conditions.

For treatment, the idea was to provide each village with a radio and 2 health aide. The aide would be able to consult with a doctor on the radio, describing the symptoms, and would follow the treatment prescribed by the doctor.

About \$100,000 has been asked for in next year's Federal budget to start the training program for aides. They will get eight to 12 weeks training at the hospital in Anchorage, followed by one or two weeks practical training at the service area hospitals, before being returned to the villages.

There is no firm plan for salaries for the aides, because the pay for 200 aides, even two hours a day at the lowest Federal level, would be \$1 million a year. Some money may be available for salaries after it is proven that the aides save money by avoiding trips to the hospital for minor illnesses.

One other question was whether the aides should be paid by the Federal Government or by the villages. Payment by the villages was the method advocated, because the aides will represent the villages, not the Federal Government.

However, it was recognized that many villages did not have the resources to pay the aides. One suggestion was that legislation be introduced to supply some money to the villages, so that they could pay the aides.

One other problem was the poor radio communication with some villages. The aides will be given standing instructions for treatments when they can't contact the doctors; this will avoid charges of practicing medicine without a license. The communications problem was also discussed later.

The prevention program involves using the health aides to provide education in the villages, providing immunizations, and arranging extended visits to the villages by experts in various areas of health.

One important consideration was involving the Natives in this prevention campaign. The health committee of the Alaska Feder-

ation of Natives was suggested as a means of providing this involvement.

Dr. Lauster of the Public Health Service spoke on the programs to provide water and waste disposal service in the villages. The program started in 1960, when a law was passed allowing the PHS to participate with Native villages in such projects.

Several projects have been completed, and projects are expected this summer at Tanana, Tanacross, and Tetlin. The requirements are that the villages participate in the construction, and then handle the operation and maintenance of the equipment.

To start a project, the village council submits a project proposal. It is considered, along with other projects, by a review committee. If it is accepted, a priority is assigned.

Next, the project must be included in the Federal Budget. After the money is obtained, the PHS and the village prepare a project summary describing the project and the participation.

A memorandum of understanding is then signed. This is a legal commitment, describing what the PHS and the village will each contribute. The project is then constructed and turned over to the village for operation.

Normally the completed project is entirely in the hands of the villagers, but it may be possible to get Federal funds in case of disasters, such as the fire at the water system at Unalakleet. One factor in getting such funds would be the care given to the facilities—indicating how greatly the village desired project.

Next, Dr. Hartman, acting commissioner of education, gave a report. He stressed the importance of "What do you want for your children" in the plans of his department.

Hartman said that the department was drawing up several alternate plans for regional high schools, and that the Training Corporation of America plan had not been finally accepted. He added that the rural population was undergoing changes, and it was not possible to make firm plans too far into the future.

His own philosophy was that practice, as demonstrated by past experience of the Alaska school system, was a better guide than theory.

On rural high schools, he said he preferred that the students attend smaller high schools, close to home and with a minimum of boarding facilities, up to the tenth grade.

He felt that 150-250 students was the proper size for such schools, although an adequate program up to that level could be given in schools as small as 100 students.

For the 11th and 12th grades, he felt that the students should be given the option of transferring to larger high schools, for more specialized training, or graduate from the smaller schools.

He used auto-mechanic vocational education as an example of a program which would have to be offered in central locations. Also, the central schools would evolve into community colleges if there is such a demand.

He said that steps were already being taken to provide small boarding facilities at Tok and Glenallen in line with the idea of smaller, local high schools for the rural population. Tanana was another example of a town where such schools could be developed.

Asked about school facilities, Dr. Hartman said that a school the size of the one at Tanana should have a multi-purpose room, and that it should not be necessary to use makeshift quarters for some classes. However,

there is a problem in obtaining the money to build all the desired facilities.

On the quality of rural schools, he commented that the first-grade students at Tanana showed reading ability above average. However, he admitted that more isolated communities might not do as well.

One problem, he continued, was that the village students did not have as wide a range of background experiences as city children. "Every experience a child has is education," he said. Also, there was sometimes a language barrier in the rural areas.

Adults who did not have a high school diploma, Dr. Hartman said, had three opportunities: First, take a G.E.D. test at a community college. This test will show if a person has the education normally gained in high school. If so, a certificate is granted, and this is accepted as a diploma in most cases.

Second, the adult can take correspondence courses to get a diploma. Third, adult education programs can be given where there are enough students. Normally, 15 students are required for a class in a subject.

Hartman suggested that these classes could be given using the facilities and staff for a small regional high school.

"The ideas and ambitions for developing Alaska will not come from Juneau or Washington, but from the people on the spot," Dr. Hartman said. "Then it will grow from within...."

(To Be Continued)