

The Signs of Political Awakening

This year, more than ever before, political candidates for national and state offices are working hard to capture the Native vote in the remote areas of Alaska. These men are realizing that this vote is vital to them; that it could spell the difference in getting elected.

This surge of interest among the politicians is due to definite signs of political awakening of the Native people in our state. The recent and telling demonstration of this was by the Arctic Slope Native Association, with headquarters at Barrow, when that group endorsed Governor William A. Egan, U.S. Senator E.L. (Bob) Bartlett, and Representative and State Speaker of the House Mike Gravel, favoring him over the incumbent U.S. Rep. Ralph J. Rivers. This action by the ASNA, rocked the political structure throughout Alaska and served notice to the people of the state that the political potential of the Aleuts, Indians, and Eskimos was not to be taken lightly. This carries considerable weight when one realizes that there are some 50,000 Native people in the state, roughly 20 or 25 per cent of the total population of Alaska.

Another definite sign of the awakening of our people was when they backed, the now well known, regional high school package in which Mike Gravel figured prominently. It was, perhaps, the very first time our people have ever backed an issue and the effort, no doubt, helped to pass the measure in the state legislature and which will be put for public vote in the coming November election. This demonstrated that some measure of concerted political effort among the Native people can have a telling effect in the political structure of our state.

These are signs we should always keep in mind and the time to do it is this year—NOW—and in the future.