

Tundra Times



Integral Part of People's Heritage
It's Not Just Informing and Reporting

Don't Just Hear the Land Speak
It's Not Just Informing and Reporting

Report Kautlan in the Way, You're Not

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Editorial

We were shocked and distressed to read the lead story in the April 24 issue of the *Bristol Bay Times*, which stated that the Dillingham Police Department is under investigation by the State Commission on Human Rights for allegations of racial discrimination.

According to the newspaper, the investigation reportedly focuses on the treatment of Alaska Natives picked up for protective custody and on alcohol-related offenses.

It also states that some of the specific allegations and complaints conveyed to the commission by witnesses interviewed included:

- Photographs of intoxicated Natives taken by department employees were hung on a refrigerator in the dispatch area of the police department, in view of anyone being released from jail or otherwise entering the area.

- At an employee Christmas party in the department, an upside-down Christmas tree was displayed decorated with blood-filled vacuum tubes that are commonly used for blood alcohol testing. The tree was allegedly also decorated with a fake Christmas card, made to look as though sent by a local Native, and with a picture of that individual, intoxicated, on the cover.

The article also states that many of the complaints were related to what one witness called "an attitudinal problem toward Natives" on the part of certain members of the police department.

These are allegations only, and the commission is not allowed to discuss current investigations. That means there is no way of knowing whether they are true. Certainly, we hope they are not.

But if they are, there is only one word for this sort of behavior: racism.

We find it particularly distressing that the apparent targets of these alleged incidents are not only Alaska Natives, but Alaska Natives who may have an alcohol problem. We hope the commission's investigation sheds some light on these complaints and that whatever problems exist — if any — will be solved quickly.

All of us — Alaska Native and non-Native — are hurt by racism. We must constantly fight the battle against this ugly and painful problem. Our society will be healthy only when all of us are treated fairly, whatever our cultural background.

Former Gov. Bill Sheffield said it very well when he pointed out in a speech to the Alaska Federation of Natives that our society will thrive only if diversity within our system is encouraged.

OUR THANKS

Once again our typesetting equipment has broken down, and once again we are indebted to Anchorage Printing Inc. for helping us get our newspaper printed.

We remain in a very precarious and vulnerable financial position at the *Tundra Times*, and it is only through the help of our friends that we are able to operate.

Thank you, Anchorage Printing.