

Excitement Eliminated—

Science Conference Pulls General Sessions from Program

FAIRBANKS—Most of the excitement of the 22nd Alaska Conference was eliminated—along with Native participation—because the usually controversial general sessions were stricken from the program.

The bulk of the conference was devoted to topics of little general interest like "Effect of Activity and Cold on the Metabolic Rate and Body Temperature of Redpolls." A panel on Native Education was an exception, however, and a lively one.

Dr. Frank Darnell, moderator and head of the Center of Northern Education Research at the University of Alaska, set the pace by declaring it had been well established that pro-

blems existed and he hoped emphasis would be on solutions.

"The Natives must become more involved in any changes that are going to come in our education," began Adam John, Fairbanks Native Community Center. "We have an abundance of welders. We have an abundance of janitors...people who have become vocationally educated. Those policies they set for us have never been our own.

"We are never going to become extinct despite programs... Well, we are never going to become extinct!"

John warned that educated Indians and Eskimos pose a threat to the establishment.

"Educators should be viewed

as businessmen with a product we need," he concluded. "We can demand high quality."

As for conferences on education, "If they don't invite us, we should do some gate crashing!"

John Shively, director of RurAL CAP which runs 38 Head Start programs, maintained the key to success in rural education is reliance on local people to carry out the programs.

"Our experience has proved that village people can make the kinds of decisions that we've asked them to and can carry out the responsibility for running an educational program," he said.

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"The Rural CAP success in using local people as staff members should be looked at more closely by the State Operated Schools and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. We have proved that Native people can teach even though they may not have the traditionally accepted college background."

Shively recommended that local people be given control over their school system including hiring and firing, setting curriculum guidelines and the development of budgets.

He also suggested that one or two demonstration villages be chosen by the Bureau of Indian Affairs or the state for such a project.

Morris Thompson, area director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs for Alaska, reported his agency is dedicated to going out of the education business in favor of state control.

Currently, however, the BIA is operating 53 day schools in rural villages with 15,583 students and teachers. In addition The Bureau sends over 500 students out of state for lack of facilities. The number of out of staters is decreasing steadily, he said.

To date 81 schools have been turned over to the state by the BIA. "I think this is healthy," he said.

Sam Kito, a member of the Fairbanks Native Association and the local school board, suggested regional school boards replace the conglomeration of state, local and BIA boards currently in operation throughout the state.

He felt the boards should be given full control as a regular school board is. The regions could be set up of those established by the Alaska Federation of Natives, he suggested.

"The Arctic Slope Native Assn., AFN, and Tanana Chiefs were appointed as an ad hoc committee assigned to planning a better boarding facility," he told them.

The results were a building that is homey and comfortable instead of the "usual barracks."

The capability this group showed indicates, in Kito's thinking, an ability of Natives to handle their own educational problems and handle them well.

Harry Carter, executive direc-

tor of the Alaska Federation of Natives, went contrary to Dr. Darnell's direction to review: "the unprecedented rape of the past and current landlords of this state."

He said until recent years Alaska's most valuable resource—her people—have been overlooked.

"Today we're not asking to participate, we're demanding it!" he said.

Dr. Judith Kleinfeld, researcher from the University of Alaska, spoke on the value of research noting with a smile every native family, according to the last census, contains a mother, a father, three children and one researcher.

She warned that common sense and "expert" judgement could not always be trusted. As an example she cited work her department had on the Alaska Boarding Home program.

It was assumed that middle income families who took children, not for the money but to help them, would be the best. But this was not so. Many poorer families who took the children for the money proved better foster parents, she said. And so she pleaded for more and better research.

A refreshing finale came from Dr. Marshall Lind, newly appointed Commissioner of Education who has been in office just five days. He didn't pretend to be an expert on state programs but he made it clear he favored local involvement.

"It's high time we addressed ourselves to assessing correctly what teachers can do rather than just their credits. Hell, they don't have to have a degree and all that other certification if they can definitely do a good job!"

In conclusion, Dr. Darnell tried to pin panelists down on whether they would favor an experimental regional school-board if the legislature would fund it.

There was hedging, the legality of such a move was questioned. There was a question of more research and whether the rural area would accept such an innovation.

"My answer is to do it," concluded Shively. "It's nice to plan but no matter how much you plan you are never going to get into it until you do it."