

# 1991 needs unity of purpose, variety of ideas

This promises to be one of the liveliest weeks in Alaska Native affairs that we will experience this year. There are not one, but two, major gatherings taking place in Anchorage; the annual convention of the Alaska Federation of Natives, and the first General Assembly of the new United Tribes of Alaska.

The year 1991, when shareholders in the Alaska regional and village corporation will be issued new shares to replace those they now hold is central to both gatherings. The new shares are scheduled to be alienable, unless some major change takes place between now and 1991. That is, they can be bought and sold by anyone, Native or non-Native. With them could go Native lands and heritage. There are also other problems facing the convention and general assembly goers: what to do for those children, cryptically called "the afterborns," who entered this life after December 18, 1971, and who by the provisions of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act have no inherent right to the shares, and thereby lands, that have sustained their peoples' heritage for millenia.

There is the issue of tribal sovereignty, and how to address the rights of village Indian Reorganization Act and traditional governments. Do they have the power to levy taxes? Can they tax state-chartered ANCSA corporations?

What is the best way to protect Native interests after 1991? Within the Native community there are many different opinions as to just what the best answers and solutions should be.

Feelings are high, and so is the potential for great stress, not only between Natives and non-Natives, but also between different groups of Natives ourselves.

Yet there is an interesting phenomena: listen to different voices within the different Native groups. It seems that virtually all involved Natives whatever method they believe best, are calling for actions which they hope will increase Native identity, respect and self-sufficiency; be it through tribal governments, corporations, or both.

It is with interest then that we look south, towards the Navajo and Hopi Tribes. Thanks to an action taken by the U.S. government in the late 1870's, when it created Navajo and Hopi boundaries and "joint use" areas in the lands which they had both long inhabited, the two nations have been bitter foes.

Lawyers have gotten rich as they have taken the Navajo-Hopi, U.S.-created dispute into the courts. But now, much to the frustration of their lawyers, the leaders of the two nations, Navajo Peterson Zah and Hopi Luan Sidney, are working together, appearing in public places together and talking together. They are saying we can talk together, we can work out our problems without expensive court battles which make lawyers rich and Indians poor. It just may work.

Frankly, many of the potential conflict zones within the Alaska Native Community have been created by actions of the government. There are many non-Natives in law and resource exploitation fields who stand to benefit handsomely should Natives disagree too loudly.

Yet disagreement can be good. It can bring more ideas to the surface and create better solutions than unthinking, unanimous consent. We only hope that as disagreement and different ideas surface, everyone will remember their basic interests are the same; all share a common heritage in Alaska. Disagree, yes. But also keep open the doors of good will and sincere dialogue.