

Rev. Jackson seeks Indian, Native support

By Linda Lord-Jenkins
Tundra Times

The Rev. Jesse Jackson, the black Baptist Minister and possible presidential candidate, last week asked the nation's Indians to join his "Rainbow Coalition" to force the Democratic Party to pay attention to all minority group problems.

Speaking to the National Conference of American Indians, Jackson told America's first people that their issues have been ignored for years by the white male power structure and the upcoming presidential campaign is no different.

"The seven Democratic candidates met for a debate in Boston recently and they didn't mention the American Indian . . . It doesn't matter if we are being ignored by the elephant (the Republican Party symbol) or the donkey (the Democrat's symbol) as long as we are ignored," said Jackson.

"If you had had a woman or a black or an Indian on that stage they could never be ignored again," he said.

Jackson is founder of the Chicago-based Operation PUSH (People United to Save Humanity) which is working out economic agreements between the nation's large employers and black minority groups. He was a disciple of Martin Luther King, the slain civil rights leader of the 1960s, and has become the most visible of the King followers.

Although he has not an-

nounced his candidacy as a Democratic candidate, Jackson has been making campaign-like speeches across the country as part of a drive to drastically increase the number of black registered voters. It is a known fact that Ronald Reagan won the five southern states in the 1980 election by 180,000 votes when those states had three million unregistered voters. Jackson stresses that fact when he urges minority groups to register and to vote.

A gifted and inspiring speaker, the Baptist preacher tailored his speech to the audience of tribal representatives. In fact, outside of a pow-wow and feast, the Jackson speech was the best-attended event of the NCAI conference which suffered from chronic lack of delegates and disorganization.

And the Jackson speech was stirring. Telling the tribal representatives that America has been glorifying "terrorists" when cowboy movies are made, he told the group that only a "Rainbow Coalition" could force the white male power structure to sit up and take notice of the problems of the nation's minority peoples.

"We must stand together and resist this oppressive country or die apart as fools," said Jackson.

"We have the obligation as the rejected stones of this society to turn to each other and not on each other . . . We can do together what we cannot do apart. The rejected

stones can become the cornerstone of a new republic."

Jackson told the group that some accomplishments have been made in the last 20 years in which the black civil rights movement has been alive. But they have been advances with irony.

"Now we can afford to go to any school but we can't afford to pay the tuition. We can live in any neighborhood but we can't afford the house mortgage. We can drive our cars down any highway but can't afford the gas.

"Our new freedom is like a doughnut except we are living in the hole and missing the dough . . . We are missing the essence of the proposition."

Jackson had obviously done his homework on American Indian matters as he recited the series of broken treaties with Lower 48 Indians and added broken voting right laws to the list. He called for the re-authorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act which expires this year and supported tribal control of local implementation of that act.

He called for "putting teeth in the Indian Religious Freedom Act" and said minorities should support this act as "a matter of principle." The group applauded that statement.

But the great part of his theme was seeking a share of the economic opportunity pot.

"It's not enough to give a job to every Black, Indian, Hispanic. In slavery we had full

employment. The issue is not just full employment. It's full development . . .

"We are not for aid, we're for trade. We are not for charity. We are for parity. We are not for welfare. We are for our share."

At the end of the speech a young black man in the audience shouted "Run, Jesse, Run," a cry that has risen from many of Jackson's speeches in the past. No delegates took up the cry.

But when Jackson asked for a show of hands from those who would like to see him run for the presidency many hands were raised. Fewer hands went up when he asked people to take a contribution card to return to him.

He said a Jackson candidacy would make the leading Democrats listen to minority issues but it is unlikely that he could win the party's nomination.

Alaska delegates generally liked Jackson's speech and were impressed by his oratorical style, but most people hoped he wouldn't make a serious bid for the presidency because he might split a ticket and make it easy for Reagan to win again.

John Hope, Tlingit-Haida delegate and newly elected NCAI area vice-president, said he thinks this is the year for a woman or minority vice-presidential candidate and Jackson could fill that slot.

When asked if Jackson's candidacy and voter registration campaign would work in "In-

dian country," different answers were given, some from the same person. NCAI president Joe De La Cruz said prior to the Jackson speech that he doubted that a black could inspire a voter registration effort. "That has to be done on the local tribal and reservation level." But at a press conference after the Jackson address, De La Cruz said a Jackson candidacy could inspire Indian voting.

Former NCAI executive director Ron Andrade who now works in the BIA Sacramento area office, said he isn't impressed with Jackson's Operation PUSH because it bargains for jobs for blacks only and agreements between PUSH and Coca-Cola recently only mentioned blacks, to the exclusion of others of the "Rainbow" coalition.

He said he would be watching for PUSH's next agreement to see if it includes the entire spectrum.

However, Spud Williams of the Tanana Chiefs Conference said that didn't bother him. "When one minority makes a step ahead, all minorities benefit," Williams said.

