

Thoughts of a Native Chief Executive pt. 4

After meetings with Sealaska's executives, our Chief Operating Officer, Chief Financial Officer and Vice President of Administration, I know generally in all instances and specifically in some what is happening throughout Sealaska today.

Alaska Brick Company is headquartered in Anchorage with operations also in the Matanuska Valley and Fairbanks. Ocean Beauty Seafoods is based in Seattle with more than a dozen plants and offices scattered from Bristol Bay to San Francisco and overseas in Tokyo. Pacific Western Lines operates its tug and barge service from Seattle and Anchorage. Offices in Ketchikan and Seattle house the people of Sealaska Timber Company as they oversee operations throughout southeastern Alaska. During the peak season some 2,000 employees make all the companies go. In 1984 many of them were shareholders. Juneau headquarters staff of less than 40 and an 18 member Board of Directors provide, direction, support and oversight. It strikes me as all this is recalled that today it was remarkable for the three officers with whom I've just met and me to together be in the office at the same time. Corporate officers and staff spend a lot of time on the road among the subsidiaries.

I too travel considerably and to have time in the office to think about matters other than those of the moment seems a rare treat. It is too late in the day now and my thoughts return to ANCSA. A number of amendments to ANCSA are being developed by the Alaska Federation

"If there is not justice, then the next generation will come seeking the justice that was denied.."

of Natives submission to congress. AFN and regional corporations in particular are involved in a lengthy process of involving Native people in review and comment on the eight legislative proposals. At the same time the Interior Department is completing a required review of ANCSA for submission to Congress and Justice Thomas Berger is finalizing a report of his exhaustive review of ANCSA done for the ICC. The phrase "1991" is fast becoming a theme denoting a watershed time of significant events for Alaska's Native people, for most of the review, analysis, amendments, and debate focus on that section of ANCSA which mandates that in 1991 ANCSA

corporation stock becomes publicly tradeable.

The Congress will once again have to determine what is the relationship with Alaska's Native people, what is justice, what is fair. Many, both Native and non-native will argue that ANCSA is an inviolate agreement which cannot be changed. Others will argue that ANCSA must be changed or fairness and justice for Native people will not have been achieved. There will be ideologues and demagogues and thoughtful and reasonable viewpoints; there will be confusion and frustration, but ultimately there will have to be some accommodation and Congress will have to act. As one knowledgeable U.S. Senator has said, (and I paraphrase), "the concerns of Native people must be addressed; for if there is not justice, then the next generation of Native people will come before Congress seeking the justice that was denied."

Through all of this, the corporation must be sustained



and nurtured. As the Chief Executive Officer of a Native business Corporation, are my obligations to the corporation and its shareholders in each case different? It is a nagging question that won't go away, but pragmatically and practically a simple answer seems sufficient. That is, unless the corporation is profitable over time and thus is able to survive the question is moot. And in order to be profitable, the corporation's management, in a very competitive and difficult market place, must concentrate almost all its effort on the corporation's business survival.

But still more questions are raised. Are corporations diverting Native leadership, focus and priority from more fundamental and long term issues of the future of Native people? If they become strong, Native owned and controlled institutions can corporations over time be the ap-

propriate vehicles for providing the kind of long term survival leadership Native people seek?

It is ironic that in the Lower 48, Indian reservations exist with the land largely protected, but in many instances with little economic enterprise, while for Alaska Natives, the land is totally at risk and economic enterprise accounts for almost all Native organizations and activity.

Neither system is wholly satisfactory and Indian and Alaska Native people continue to seek solutions.

Sealaska, like most corporations, has business plans and a strategic plan — we spend much time planning. From these plan and my own thinking, I have developed a con-

"The phrase '1991' is fast becoming a theme denoting a watershed time of significant events..."

cept of the Sealaska of the future which helps me sort through this thicket of issues and questions.

First, I believe that at the very least, the requirement in ANCSA that in 1991 the corporations go public, should be changed to give corporations the option of going public if and when their shareholders choose. This is only good business and good public policy. Shareholders get a raw deal — not a good deal — if the market place knows precisely when a private company is to go to public and has a long period of time to plan. Any price-setting and negotiation favors the buyer, not the seller in this circumstance. From a public policy viewpoint, why should Congress in the first place have required that the corporations go public at any time unless and until their shareholders decided? The requirement has no good public policy purpose.

