

# Language center shouldn't be cl

It is no secret to anyone in the state that the languages of the Native peoples of Alaska are facing extinction. In some of the tribes only a handful of the tribe members speak the language.

It would be difficult for it to be otherwise, given the incredible outside influence taking charge of the state and everything about it.

Television shows now go into almost every village in the state and those television shows are all in the English language. Most teachers in the schools are English and speak only that language. For a long time speaking a Native language in school was a punishable offense.

There also is the problem that the Native languages were not written. The Inupiaq language has gone through two different written versions – both provided by white men.

Because of these and many other reasons, the Natives of Alaska may soon have no language other than that which comes from a European background.

There are attempts to change that. The Inupiat Spirit Committee officially recognized that preservation of the language is a cultural priority. The Sealaska Heritage Foundation is working to teach the language of the Ilingits and Hailas to their children.

But there is little beyond that and one institution that had worked to preserve and teach the languages has just been informed that it will not get nearly enough money to continue its work.

The National Bilingual Development Center had its budget first cut, then transferred to the University system for "safekeeping" then cut again. That means that the center won't be able to put out any more than one book this year and probably that the Center will close within six months, according to Director Tupai Pulu.

The center had been the primary source for educational material to most bilingual programs in the state.

Evidently the preservation and teaching of the Native languages of Alaska wasn't enough of a priority for the University Regents to continue funding.

The regents should consider that they have an obligation to the people of the state who were here before the mostly white regents and white teachers. And the University also should remember that the extinction of a language cannot be changed by reinstituting funding in a couple of years.

Things go fast in today's culture. It would be an unpardonable crime for the school – which finds enough money to offer free housing and telephone service to non-school organizations – to refuse money to a program which is so greatly needed.