

"I may not agree with what you say but I will defend unto death your right to say it" -VOLTAIRE

Editorial Comment

AFN and ANC: A WELCOME CONSENSUS

The news that the Alaska Native Coalition is now cooperating with the Alaska Federation of Natives in order to produce a piece of legislation which reflects a larger consensus in the Native community is welcome, indeed. There are some who have enjoyed the appearance of disunity for far too long.

The opponents of the 1991 amendments are a small but vocal group of Alaskans who understand little or nothing about ANCSA, the 1991 issues, or the legislation designed to maintain Native control over Native lands and assets. They enjoy seeing Native spokesmen dispute the efficacy of the AFN bill, because the onus of proving that the amendments would cause harm to the state and the Native community is no longer with them.

Their arguments are, after all, tired and worn, irrational, and based on malice toward Alaska Natives. Their catchphrase, "Equality for all Alaskans," means preserving the status quo in favor of them — the privileged majority, the educated, the pampered and the prosperous — and to the disadvantage of Alaska Natives, who merely wish to have some control over their own lives. What a treat it must be for them to be able to point the finger and say, "Where's the consensus?"

IS DOI OVERPLAYING ITS HAND?

With ANC and AFN together on the legislation at last, and Sen. Frank Murkowski holding Subcommittee hearings on S. 2065 in Bethel on July 10, we wonder whether or not the Department of Interior will finally quit 'sandbagging' and take a stand on the bill.

When the *Tundra Times* made inquiries to ascertain the position of Interior on the bill, we were referred to the testimony offered by a DOI Legislative Counsel, J. Stephen Britt, in Fairbanks last month.

Britt's testimony began by saying that Interior is "currently conducting an in depth analysis of the proposed legislation in order to ensure that it conforms with this Administration's policies." Interior still has "faith in its (ANCSA's) *original* design," Britt says in his testimony, so "any changes or amendments...must be carefully scrutinized."

Later, Britt identifies certain minor concerns that DOI has with the bill — little things like continuing prohibitions against stock alienation, issuance of stock to 'new Natives', exempting undeveloped lands from taxation — basically, the guts of the whole bill!

This raises some questions in our minds: Why do DOI officials think that the 1991 legislation is a departure from the *original* act, which they purport to support the intent of? What is preventing them from formulating a clear position on this bill? If there are land management concerns over problems which may result from some provisions of the bill, isn't this the time to voice them? The bill, after all, may be passed this year.

Interior, meanwhile, continues to play the reluctant suitor, ever demure, yet not wanting to appear to demur.