

Johnson to resign from Bering Straits

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Charles H. Johnson recently announced his plans to resign from his position as president of the Bering Straits Native Corporation. When Johnson took over the presidency of Bering Straits, the corporation was involved in 70 separate pieces of litigation and was losing millions of dollars.

Johnson said that it would take him three to five years to turn the corporation around.

It has been four years since Johnson took over the corporation; the corporation has settled the lawsuits and are plaintiffs rather than defendants and Johnson predicts that the balance sheets will probably begin to show a positive slant, "despite the fact that we've had to come from so far behind," said Johnson.

In those four years, Johnson believes that he has helped build reassurance and credibility for Bering Straits. Johnson also believes that the corporation may become a leader in some areas.

Under his direction, the corporation built an office building "a nice building with our name on it," said Johnson.

An area that Johnson hoped to improve when he took over Bering Straits was the relationship between the Bering Straits villages and the regional corporation. When he came into the corporation, the villages were threatening to sue the regional corporation.

He said they tried an experi-

ment in restructuring the board by getting representatives from every village. Although the plan didn't work, Johnson said, "it demonstrated that our roots are in the villages."

In terms of current 1991 issues, Johnson stated that their villages support the proposed ANCSA amendments. "We have traveled extensively throughout Alaska informing the people about the amendments," said Johnson. He feels that the groups opposing the proposed ANCSA amendments and the AFN March Convention are getting poor advice. "We have lost more rights through ill-advised litigation," he added. For the people that say the amendments should be dealt with after Thomas Berger's report is completed, he said, "we already know what his report will say, because he's been saying it all along." He added that those concerns are the same as the concerns that are being addressed in the amendments: Native lands, subsistence, and self-government.

Johnson plans to give his formal resignation to the board at the end of this month. He said he's burnt out. He plans to take a break and later on do some consulting work for the corporations. "I'll still be on the AFN Board until this fall, so it's not like I'm just leaving" Bering Straits behind, said Johnson.

As a final note, Johnson said the shareholders need to know that the new corporation president will need their support: "positive feedback really helps," concluded Johnson.