

UTA announces Village Caucus meeting

Alaska Native village and tribal government leaders met in Anchorage recently to discuss how they may overcome what they believe are critical problems in the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. The villagers attending the two day "special general assembly" of the United Tribes of Alaska, developed several policy statements regarding the current review of ANCSA and the role of the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) and the ANCSA regional corporations.

The UTA assembly strongly objected to the "closed-door" approach of AFN, which has resulted in a serious lack of participation of Alaska Natives and their village and tribal governments in AFN's drafting of ANCSA - 1991 resolutions. The AFN has stated they hope to make final decisions on the resolutions at a special convention to be held this month. UTA chairman, Sheldon Katchatag, stated, "this assembly has adopted the position that AFN is misrepresenting itself before congress and the public when it

holds itself out as the 'spokesman' for the Alaska Native people, their villages and tribal government."

The assembly took the position that AFN can only rightly claim to represent the twelve regional corporations organized under ANCSA, and not the Native people or their tribal governments. Katchatag also noted that AFN's refusal to address the village and tribal government concerns will not result in Native unity.

The UTA assembly decried the AFN's hasty effort and pressure upon the Alaska Native community to come to an immediate final decision on ANCSA amendments and 1991 policies. In addressing the AFN's special ANCSA Convention, to be held in Anchorage during the last week of March, the UTA village and tribal government assembly held that the convention is ill timed and should be postponed until October of this year. According to a recent press release from UTA, they feel that there is a clear and growing division within the Native community over whether

the "ANCSA Convention" should be held now, or later in the year when several major report studies and commission findings will be available.

In addressing the closing session of the assembly, Katchatag noted, "AFN wants to force a decision now, without a vote of the Native people and knowing full well that the people wish to first hear from the Alaska Native Review Commission, the federal government's 1985 ANCSA study group, and the Governor's Task Force on Tribal-State Relations." He concluded by saying, "we need to educate ourselves and our people...we have the obligation and right to research all the issues and hear all the reports, not just those AFN wishes us to see."

There is growing apprehension

and anxiety among Alaskan Natives and their village tribal leaders about what will happen to their land and their way of life in 1991 when Native corporations and Native lands will no longer be protected by law.

In response to apprehensions, which center upon the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, and actions to be taken by AFN and regional corporate leaders at the upcoming AFN-ANCSA Convention, the United Tribes of Alaska has called for a statewide gathering of village representatives and tribal leaders. The UTA will facilitate a UTA - Village Caucus, March 26th through the 27th." Brady, who is the Chief Justice of the Tribal Court in Sitka, also commented that, "The UTA Village Caucus will discuss common strategy for

meeting the challenges of ANCSA, expanding the participation at the grassroots of our Native communities, and how to carry these various strategies out on the floor of AFN's special convention."

UTA village tribal leaders and delegates met in Anchorage recently and adopted two major policy positions, with respect to the March AFN Special ANCSA Convention. The first, is a call for every village tribal government and Native organization to send a formal resolution to the AFN Convention calling for (1) the tabling of the AFN 1991 Resolutions until October, and (2) postponement of the AFN March Convention. The second position is that any ANCSA Resolutions must be submitted to direct ratification vote of the Alaska Native people.