

# Publisher's Notes

## ANRC: THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

This past week marks the end of the Alaska Native Review Commission's "Round Table" discussions and village hearings. In many ways, this year-long, fact-finding mission by former Canadian Justice Thomas R. Berger, has been more informative than his report may be.

The ANRC hearings created for us a rather unique "mirror" through which we could view ourselves, perhaps in a way we would not have otherwise dared. We have been able to identify our weaknesses as a people and to take a measure of our strengths too. The process, for some of us, has not been easy, in fact, it probably has been very painful for some.

The ANRC's hearings have reflected Alaska Natives as people fearful of losing the land we live on and receive sustenance from, and it has shown us the distrust we have of the corporate structure that was a part of ANCSA. More than that, however, the hearings have shown us the fear we have of ourselves and the distrust we have of each other.

Reflections from the ANRC hearings have also shown the abundance of ideas that our people have, the amount of energy we are willing to give and the resourcefulness we have as a people, all of which we will eventually put toward protecting the land for us and future generations.

The Berger Commission has raised more questions than there are answers for right now. Many of the questions are theoretical in nature and there probably will be no answers. Some of the questions about "the place of Alaska Natives in the world" can only be answered by ourselves and by history. Many of us are unrealistically expecting Thomas Berger to answer questions that we cannot answer for ourselves, and in that regard, we can expect to be disappointed with the report because such questions we have been asking about our culture, our identity, and our future can only be answered by us.

From one perspective, the ANRC hearings have been delusive in that some have created images of themselves as leaders. Espousing ideas over and over again before a "commission" has the effect of lending some legitimacy to those ideas, and those espousing them see themselves as leaders. In reality, are they?

From another perspective, the Berger hearings have had a polarization effect, which may not have been there otherwise. It is doubtful that the effect, if there was one, will be long lasting. The polarization or division of political ideas that reflected from the hearings can also be a strength and a resource for Alaska Natives.

The Honorable Thomas R. Berger has before him an awesome task of putting on paper the expressions of frustration, the bleatings of some who are confused about their own identity, the fears of the distrustful and the courage of those who have been chosen to lead at a time when there is much at stake. He is indeed a courageous man to have accepted the task of making recommendations about governance, protection of the lands and culture and maybe trying to answer questions that we cannot answer for ourselves, right now.

We wish Justice Berger well as he begins the task of reporting his findings and recommendations on how ANCSA affected Alaska Natives.