

# Editorial



## ***Native issues demand attention***

**by the Alaska Federation of Natives**

**for the Tundra Times**

Sen. Daniel Inouye, D-Hawaii, chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs recently held a hearing in Washington on a significant piece of congressional legislation.

S. 1364, a bill to establish a joint federal-state commission on policies and programs affecting Alaska Natives, had been introduced earlier by Sens. Frank Murkowski and Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, John McCain, R-Ariz., and Inouye. Companion legislation was introduced in the House by Congressman Don Young, R-Alaska.

If adopted by the Congress and supported by the state government, this commission could open a significant new period of public policy for Alaska Natives.

The concept of a joint commission arose from the publication of AFN's *Report on the Status of Alaska Natives: A Call for Action*. That document, published in January, presented data on several facets of the current Native crisis. It described social pathology in individuals and families, lack of economic opportunities in urban and rural Alaska and serious shortcomings in the elementary and secondary education of Native children.

In response to the report, AFN recommended that the Congress, in cooperation with the state, establish an authoritative policy commission to conduct an in-depth evaluation of where Alaska Natives stand, as we enter the last decade of the 20th century and what practical steps the federal and state government should take to address the problems described.

No comprehensive analysis of the social and economic status of Alaska Natives, including federal and state services, has been conducted by any unit of government in almost two decades.

The creation of such a special commission has historical precedent. In the late 1960s, Congress turned to the Federal Field Committee for Development Planning in Alaska and directed it to research the settlement of Alaska Native land claims. In the mid-1970s, Congress created the American Indian Policy Review Commission to conduct a thorough analysis of Indian issues and procedures nationwide.

It is time for such an effort again. The disturbing economic and social data on Alaska Natives demand our attention. Support for S. 1364 has been voiced by Inouye, the Alaska Congressional Delegation and Gov. Steve Cowper.

AFN strongly urges that the legislation be adopted and the commission established by Oct. 1. Then, it will be up to the appointing authorities to select commission members for the serious task at hand.

