

CINA loses board seat

by Jim Benedetto

Tundra Times Editor

The Alaska Federation of Natives took an unprecedented move during their board meeting on December 5, approving a motion to amend their bylaws in order to unseat Cook Inlet Native Association (CINA) from its board and replace them with the Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC). The motion passed 13-4, with eight abstentions. Although CINA remains a member of AFN, the organization is no longer eligible for 'class A' membership.

The reasons for the motion, in-

troduced by the Cook Inlet Region, Inc., were explained in a letter by CIRI president Roy Huhndorf to the other board members.

Huhndorf cited CIRI's 1983 shareholders meeting when shareholders voiced concerns that CINA had "fallen out of touch with the needs and desires of the Native people enrolled to the Cook Inlet Region," because of that organization's inclusion of Natives from regions other than Cook Inlet, and non-Alaskan Indians.

The fact that many of CINA's board

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members could be non-CIRI shareholders deprived CIRI of the legitimate pressure that it could otherwise have applied in response to CIRI shareholder dissatisfaction. This, coupled with the letter's assertion that CINA did not have the 'regional perspective' of the Cook Inlet Region, led CIRI to establish the Cook Inlet Tribal Council as the non-profit corporation with a regional perspective for the Cook Inlet Region. Since CINA lacked the "regional perspective," Huhndorf argued, it no longer deserved to represent the non-profit concerns of the Cook Inlet Region on

the AFN board.

Another reason cited in the letter to the board for CINA's unseating adds a different perspective to the dispute. "No other Region has been made to look ridiculous by its so-called regional non-profit. No other Regional Corporation has had to tolerate the embarrassment we have felt because of CINA's repeated contradictions of our views. No other Regional Corporation has had its tribal status for its at-large shareholders challenged in federal courts by its non-profit, the way we have been challenged by CINA."

CINA president Jacqueline Guzialek responded to the board with a letter explaining CINA's position on the proposed "ouster," saying, "It is no secret that CINA and CIRI disagree on many political and philosophical points... We believe that is healthy and not a problem to be resolved... by ousting CINA from AFN." And Guzialek raises another concern — that, "Removing CINA may well be the first step to limiting the voice of other non-profits as well." Guzialek also raised the concern that the removal of CINA from AFN, a voluntary organization, "may become a precedent for like actions in other regions."

Arguments on both sides of the issue were brought out and discussed by the board — absent the voices of the Interim Village Board, unseated at that time — before the vote. It seemed a difficult decision for many of the board members, as indicated by the eight abstentions.

CINA has been plagued by more than its share of problems in the recent past, from the loss of much of its village support — much of which is gone because village councils are striking out to contract for their own services — to the recent multiple resignations of dissident board members. In addition, CINA's health department

has been defunded, and administration of local Johnson O'Malley (JOM) funds was recently transferred to CITC.

Notwithstanding their present misfortunes, it is Huhndorf himself who sums up CINA's future role, as he sees it, in the Anchorage area.

"CINA has an important role to play as an advocate of other Native people living here, and we would like to help them in that respect. We think that the Native community is an important cultural resource, an enriching element to living in Anchorage, certainly an enriching element to CIRI shareholders.

"There is a role that CINA can play in the community, but the board has to define that role. I don't want to be critical of CINA and their board of directors, but I do think that from what little I have observed as an outside observer, that that board needs to settle down, needs to redefine its goals in light of the changing relationship between CIRI and CINA, and I think it will find that it has a very large role to play in Anchorage.

"It can be a strong social anchor for many of the Native people living here who are not near their own non-profit or regional corporation. It can be a source of cultural enrichment. It can do many things that only organizations can do for people who are in need.

"It can probably be the impetus for maybe a Native cultural center here. It would be the appropriate entity, surely."