

# BIA balks at UTA bailout

by Jim Benedetto  
Tundra Times Editor

An official of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) in Juneau says that reports that the BIA may be providing money to the United Tribes of Alaska (UTA) to help retire the \$380,000 debt run up by September's congress at the Egan Convention Center are without merit.

"To my knowledge, it is very unlikely that a commitment could have been made by a bureau official... to offset, or in some fashion cover some of the expenses of UTA in their recent meeting," said Timothy DeAsis, director of the bureau's Division of Native Services, which handles Tribal Operations, in a telephone interview with the *Tundra Times*.

DeAsis said that any resources which might have been available for such purposes are under his supervision, but he was unable to ascertain what funds were being referred to "without having discussed with Mr.

Miller (attorney for UTA) what his understanding is."

The information that BIA may have been able to provide UTA with funding to cover some of their debt was revealed in an article in the *Anchorage Times*, "BIA may help pay off debts of tribal group," which appeared in that publication's December 4 issue.

DeAsis said that in the past, he had attempted to discover if there were a possibility for the bureau to provide funding for the group, but after numerous attempts at seeking loopholes in BIA's procurement process, he concluded that funding was unavailable. "I kept on running into brick walls," said DeAsis.

DeAsis explained that, "in recent times, when they (UTA) have become more, shall we say, politically involved with trying to influence legislation," the bureau had no option to be able to assist the organization. "You obviously cannot use federally-appropriated dollars to try and do lobbying-type activities," said DeAsis.

"We are currently unable, to my knowledge, in any fashion, to directly assist UTA in any of its efforts," added DeAsis.

DeAsis did mention that most of the villages which comprise UTA's "tribal membership" were recipients of the bureau's 104(a) — self-determination — grants. "We have advised those grantees that if that is their priority, that it is a permissible expense," said DeAsis, but that those grants would only pertain to travel and per diem expenses involved in attending statewide meetings and conventions.

DeAsis was baffled by the information in the *Anchorage Times* article, stating that verification of the truth of the matter could have easily been obtained by simply phoning the bureau. "To my knowledge, neither she (the author of the article) nor the (*Anchorage Times*) have contacted any bureau employee... Certainly none of

my staff have brought it to my attention; the area director was not aware of it."

DeAsis said that BIA has received several calls regarding the article. When asked if there had been any pressure brought to bear on bureau officials to explain the article, DeAsis said, "It would appear to me that Mr. Miller would be more in a hot seat to explain what his understanding and assertions are... and the validity of them."

The new leadership at the United Tribes of Alaska is exploring options to retire the debt. According to the *Anchorage Times*, the organization is "seeking grants from a variety of sources, and is holding fund-raisers (sic) such as raffles."

The organization is also reported to be "allowing its office phones to remain disconnected to save money," according to the *Times*.