

RESERVING THE RIGHT TO SPEAK AND DECIDE FOR OURSELVES

The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, no matter how you look at it, is one of the most complex pieces of legislation to have come out of Congress. It is also, at times, the most confusing because it is couched in legal terminology and can baffle the average layperson

It is, nonetheless, an Act which is destined to dictate the better part of our lives for generations to come, and we have a responsibility to try our best to understand and work with it.

It is as Howard Rock once stated in an editorial shortly after its passage: '...the provisions in it must always be handled carefully, always with feelings that it is being done for the good of the present generation and for the good of the Native people in the future.'

ANCSA demanded that we become experts in every aspect of business virtually 'overnight,' and many of us have. It is encouraging to sit through a two-day meeting on ANCSA, listening to a younger group of leaders addressing some of the more complex details. We have able leaders and excellent spokesmen who are proving themselves capable of handling nearly every situation. So why then do we allow lawyers to speak for us on policy issues?

It is not our purpose to offend anyone, least of all that special group of fine and dedicated men and women in the legal profession, however, there is a need to remind ourselves that there are times when we must reserve the right to speak and decide for ourselves.

COOK INLET NATIVE ASSOCIATION: IS STILL A NECESSARY ORGANIZATION

CINA, one of the oldest Native organizations in Alaska was divested of its right to vote as a member of the Alaska Federation of Natives this past week, and that's as it should be.

Ousting CINA was not a battle won or lost nor should it be viewed as a contest amongst the parties involved. The action taken simply clarified a confusing situation. Every representative with a right to vote on AFN's Board does so with a defined constituency with the exception of CINA.

CINA is an urban organization, whose purpose over the years has changed, but it is still a service agency capable of delivering services to people in the Anchorage area. Many excellent programs have been administered by CINA and there continues to be a need for the agency and the programs.

The confusion, however, comes because of the way the CINA Board is elected, and identifying the membership. The situation is not clear whether CINA represents the villagers nor is it clear whether non-Alaska Natives are allowed to vote in CINA's elections. Such matters should not be allowed to affect AFN and the other regions, particularly at this time when the 1991 amendments are being considered.

Taking away CINA's right to vote on the AFN Board will not and should not change its ability to deliver the much needed programs in Anchorage.