

Berger gets a taste of the future

By Linda Lord-Jenkins

Tundra Times Editor

The first of a series of overview hearings on the effects of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act is two weeks away but Thomas Berger who is conducting the hearings last week got a taste of some of the sentiments he might find.

Berger spoke to a group of about 35 people attending the Alaska Bilingual Multicultural Education Conference in Anchorage last week to explain the purpose and goals of the Alaska Native Review Commission. The ANRC was commissioned by the Inuit Circumpolar

Conference to determine how Alaska Natives feel about the Land Claims Act.

Berger told the group that he will visit more than 35 villages to hold hearings lasting up to three days each to discuss the feelings of villagers about the claims.

When asked how he would select villages to visit Berger explained he was talking to many groups including the Native Regional profit and non-profit corporations as well as United Tribes of Alaska, Alaska Federation of Native and other representative groups.

(Continued on Page Seven)

Berger gets a taste of what's to come

(Continued from Page One)

"Don't just talk to the Regionals," one man told him. "If you work with the corporations they give the same kind of bias. They will say go to this village and you'll get a different kind of story."

Berger responded that "I may look dumb but I wasn't born yesterday. Nobody is pulling the wool over my eyes . . . Others are saying to me

not to go just to the IRA villages and the UTA villages. We have some idea of what's going on here and are trying to go down the middle."

One woman who said she was from Southeast Alaska, told Berger that "From the beginning when western cultures landed, the Claims Act should have been the Land Rights Act."

"The corporations really don't speak for us," she added and advised him not to forget Natives living in urban Alaska who often are left out of the benefits of the regional non-profit corporations as well as the non-profits operating in urban areas."

Another man told Berger that the "Land Claims Act passed but there is no provision for people who want to be themselves and just exist. The dollar system is not ours. Our system is the renewable resource."

Berger told one questioner that his report will be written without interference from anyone but the final outcome of what happens to it is up to the ICC.

"I hope to say 'here's where Alaska Natives want to go and here are my recommendations on how to get there.'"

"If they don't like my report they can say it was a mistake. If they like it they can say it's a good job."

Berger earlier in the day held a press conference to answer questions on his two-year study's methods and announced he will go to Emmonak on Feb. 20 and Tununak on Feb. 23.

Each hearing will last three days and he hopes people from

surrounding villages will attend.

Following the hearings, three weeks of overview hearings on land claims in Alaska, the Lower 48 and the world will be held.

Berger's study is being paid for in part by the ICC and the World Council of Indigenous Peoples and he said ICC is seeking other money.

When asked if ICC had sought money from the Regional Corporations, he said they had lent "support" to the study but hedged on answering if actual funding had come from the Regionals.