

# Native sovereignty talks asked

## The Associated Press

Anchorage — Gov. Bill Sheffield wants to meet with Alaska Native leaders to discuss tribal sovereignty and the relationship of village governments to the state.

The announcement comes amidst a growing movement by Natives to govern themselves as they see fit, and ignore state laws when they conflict with

that self-determination.

Within the past year, Tyonek has asserted its right to decide who may live in the village; Venetie has denied the state's authority to regulate fish and game and vowed not to pay taxes on oil development on village property; and Kotzebue has passed an ordinance requiring employers to hire Natives or lose the right

to work there.

Sheffield said last week a meeting is needed to put "all of the issues out on the table."

"The problem is, you see, on the one hand the federal government says it's our problem, I've told the federal government I think it's their problem," the freshman Democrat said.

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# Sovereignty talks

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"It's very, very complicated . . . probably one of the bigger issues we'll face in my four years as governor."

Leaders of 37 villages organized under the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) of 1934 formed a statewide group in May known as United Tribes of

Alaska. Many of them believe the IRA villages are like mini-nations with their own governments and powers usually only accorded to political subdivisions like states.

They argue that their special treaty relationship with the federal government transcends their relationship with state

government.

But the state refuses to acknowledge the tribal units as government entities for such purposes as revenue sharing. And others insist the Natives relinquished their sovereignty when they accepted the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in 1971.

Don Wright of Fairbanks, one of the most vocal spokesmen for tribal rights, said he has attempted to arrange a meeting with state officials on the sovereignty issue for several years.

He hailed Sheffield's an-

nouncement as a major development, "an indication that he's interested in sitting down and talking."

Sheffield said he hopes to have the meeting by early fall, but is leaving selection of the time and place to the Natives.