

Extraordinary Meeting

Political Power One Purpose

October 28, 1966

The largest gathering of Native leaders ever held in Alaska ended in Anchorage last weekend with the formation of a statewide Native organization.

There were few dissenting voices heard against the action according to the new group's chairman Flore Lekanof and representatives for each of the organized Native associations throughout the state spoke in favor of the move.

Lekanof, a Pribilofian now living in Fairbanks, said the group was "primarily to exert political pressure."

The chairman said the organization would be non-partisan.

"We will support the people who support our programs."

The 22-member board of directors will probably meet two weeks before the state legislature opens, Lekanof said.

"We already have a commitment from Alfred Fothergill, temporary director of the Alaska State Community Action Program, that transportation costs of the board will be paid under the Grassroots Program."

Lekanof said the action to form the statewide organization came as a natural consequence of the Natives realizing their voting power and the need for them to solve their own problems.

"When any group of people can pull one-fifth to one-sixth of the total votes in a state than they can exert power and the Natives in this state are becoming more articulate in their desire to help themselves," Lekanof said.

"Certainly there are a lot of young Native Alaskans who are college graduates or who are attending the University of Alaska who are conscious of their ability and the importance of being able to speak up."

Lekanof said there would "certainly be discussion" on whether or not non-Natives would have some type of membership in the organization and said that unorganized areas would be represented "with the understanding that they form their own association."

"Eventually we hope to have a paid, permanent staff and are investigating the possibilities of financing now. The American Association of Indian Affairs is supported by private foundations and the AAIA is helping us to contact foundations that may be interested in supporting us."

The chairman said the different Native groups meeting in Anchorage "found they have some common problems" and the organization has set up a number of standing committees.

Robert Peratrovich, President of the Tlingit-Haida Association, is chairman of the Education Committee; Charles Edwardsen of Fairbanks chairs the Native Employment Committee; Lloyd Sutton of Anchorage chairs the Health and Welfare Committee; George Olson, president of the Chugach Native Association chairs the Transportation and Communication Committee

William Hensley of Kotzebue chairs the Land Claims Committee; Emil Notti, president of the Cook Inlet Native Association chairs the Housing Committee and Howard Rock, editor of the Tundra Times, chairs the Public Relations committee."

Lekanof said the idea for a statewide group has been advocated by several Native leaders for many years.

"When the Alaska Native Brotherhood organized 50 years ago I am sure they intended to include the entire state but their interests were mainly in southeastern Alaska and they were unable to capture the interest of the rest of the state. This latest development was spearheaded by the Fairbanks Native Association with the help of Nick Gray who also helped to organize the Cook Inlet and Kuskokwim Native Associations.

"The Tundra Times did a lot to let the people know of this movement—the newspaper you might say carved the way."

Directors of the new organization include: Emil Notti, Richard Frank, Tanana Chiefs Conference; Jules Wright, Fairbanks Native Association; Robert Peratrovich, Tlingit-Haida Association; Tony Lewis, Kuskokwim Valley Native Association; Paul Gunderson, Port Moore, unorganized; Frank Degnan, Norton Sound; George Olson, Chugach Native Association; Lloyd Sutton, Tlingit-Haida Anchorage Association; Paul Gruve, McGrath, unorganized; George Allen, Tatitlek Village Council; William Hensley, Northwest Native Association; Oscar Craig, Copper Center, Jerome Trigg, Arctic Native Brotherhood, Nome; Tom Riley, Ugashik, unorganized; Andrew Isaac, Tanacross; Markle Ewan, ANB Copper Center Camp 31; Abel Akpik, Arctic Slope Native Association; Rike Murphy, Kenai.

Nick Gray was named honorary chairman.