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TundraTIMES

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Tribal advocates heartened as political rhetoric cools

By Tundra Times Staff

A series of public and private communications last week may indicate there's room for state, Congressional and tribal representatives to discuss ways of negotiating some of the parameters of tribal authority in Alaska.

A recent decision by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals stating that the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act did not extinguish tribal authority over certain Native-owned lands, has been strongly criticized by Alaska Sens. Ted Stevens and Frank Murkowski and state officials. The state announced its intention to appeal the so-called *Venetie* decision to the U.S. Supreme Court, and Stevens threatened to introduce a measure to nullify the ruling if the state should lose its appeal.

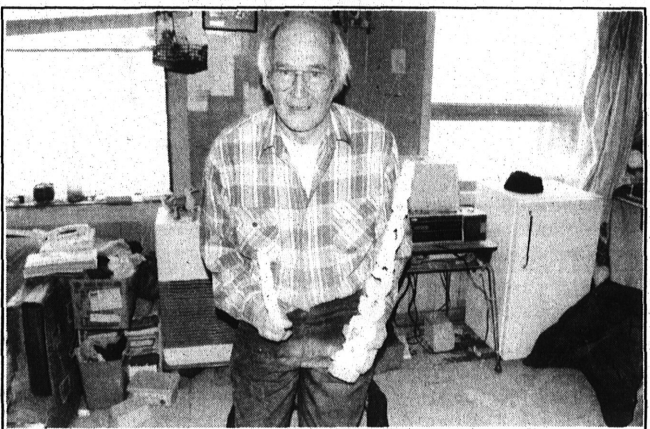
Late last week, several things happened:

- January 22 - At its winter meeting in Washington, D.C., the National Congress of American Indians passes an emergency resolution in support of the 9th Circuit ruling;
- January 22 - At the same meeting, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt states that he regards the appellate court's recognition of "Indian Country" in Alaska as the law of the land and promised to resist any attempt by Congress to nullify the ruling;
- January 23 - After meetings with leg-

islative leaders, Gov. Tony Knowles officially announces the state's decision to appeal the *Venetie* decision;

- January 24 - Will Mayo, president of Tanana Chiefs Conference, is paraphrased in a press report as saying he hopes Babbitt's comments will encourage talks between Alaska's Congressional delegation and Native leaders on legislation that both parties could live with.
- January 25 - In a morning interview, Stevens continues criticizing the *Venetie* decision. However, by afternoon, both Stevens and Murkowski have communicated through their staff a willingness to consider talks.

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Keeping Warm in Gambell

Ivory carver William Soonagrook Sr., of Gambell, St. Lawrence Island, is one of hundreds of Alaskans benefiting from a comprehensive weatherization program funded by the Alaska Housing Finance Corp. and administered by the Rural Alaska Community Action Program. For more information on the program, call 1-800-478-7227.

Photo by Rural CAP/Anita Nelson

National Coop Bank invests big in villages

Three Alaska Native village corporations are among National Cooperative Bank's newest customers in a state where the bank has a growing presence.

In all, NCB extended more than \$9.3 million to Haida Corporation, MTNT, Ltd., and Tigara Corporation. The loans are part of an estimated \$20 million that NCB expects to make to Alaska Native corporations this year.

"Our versatility and commitment to the market have made us very attractive to Alaska Native corporation," says Andrew Kho, a vice president of NCB's Corporate Team who manages the bank's Alaska portfolio. "NCB is one of the few banks that take the time to visit the Native corporations, and over the years we've

proved that we can underwrite virtually anything anywhere in the state."

NCB's biggest transaction of the year so far was with Haida Corporation, which received a \$6.5 million line of credit that it used to finance its timber operations. Haida had a similar credit facility in place with Bank of America, but it switched lenders because it believes that NCB is more likely to finance the business ventures on its horizon.

"Haida will be growing substantially in the future," says Michael Beal, the corporation's chief executive officer. "We'll be expanding from timber into different lines of business."

Haida, which is located on the island of Hydagurg, 250 miles southeast of Ju-

neau, believes it has a bright future as an energy provider; it's already won a contract to build and operate a hydroelectric power plant for Prince of Wales Island.

NCB has also extended a \$1.8 million mortgage to MTNT, Ltd., which used the money to buy an apartment building in downtown Anchorage. MTNT (a consolidation of the former McGrath, Takotna, Nikolai, and Telida village corporations) is headquartered in McGrath, 220 miles northwest of Anchorage. It's primarily an electric energy provider, serving McGrath's 146 residents and 50 businesses, but it also owns nine apartments in McGrath and has an interest in a timber company. Like Haida Corporation,

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Implementing new Native housing bill

Late last year, President Bill Clinton signed into law the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act of 1996. The Act was the result of more than one year of interaction, discussion and negotiation between and among elements of the Native American community, the Congress and various Cabinet agencies, such as the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), OMB, the Labor Department, the Justice Department and others. When so many parties become involved in the development of an Act,

very few are totally pleased with the outcome. On the other hand, through the legislative process and subsequent rule-making, there are significant opportunities for every entity to have input to those items which are most important to them. If properly carried out, the result is a legislative/programmatic package which most parties feel accommodates the majority of their needs and desires.

The passage of this Act provides the Native American community with its first housing legislation in history. Previous legislative efforts have either failed, modi-

fied existing public housing legislation or, in the case of the Indian Housing Act of 1988, simply authorized what already existed. The most obstinate stumbling block in the past was the fact that Native Americans were required to modify legislation (the 1937 Housing Act) which belonged to both Public and Indian housing authorities. As a result, every change proposed for Native Americans was also scrutinized to see how it would impact public housing. This frequently inhibited Native American legislative initiatives.

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