

North Slope leader, John Nusunginya, dies

One of "the great leaders of the North Slope" region died last week in Anchorage.

John Nusunginya Sr., a representative from Barrow in the first Alaska State Legislature and the man responsible for the hunting rights battle in Barrow in 1960, died Aug. 18 in Anchorage of heart failure. He had been ill for some time according to his daughter, Patsy Aamodt.

Nusunginya served two terms in the State House of Representatives and served as the first president of the North Slope Borough's first assembly.

He also was a member of the Village of Barrow village council.

He is survived by seven children and 12 grandchildren. His wife, the former Vera Itta, died 20 years ago, said Mrs. Aamodt.

When he served in the state House of Representatives, Nusunginya was arrested for shooting ducks outside of a hunting season established by an international migratory birds treaty.

As a test of the regulations, 138 other Barrow men shot ducks and presented themselves to federal game wardens for arrest. All charges against all hunters were dropped in 1961.

As a result of this dispute over Native subsistence rights and another dispute about a 1960 attempt to detonate a nuclear device at Cape Thompson the organization Inupiat Paitot was formed.

North Slope Borough Mayor Jacob Adams called Nusunginya



John Nusunginya

"one of the great leaders of our area. He had good foresight and worked hard to get the best for the people up here." Adams served on the Borough Assembly with Nusunginya for several years.

State Sen. Frank Ferguson from Kotzebue said he got into politics because of Nusunginya's inspiration. "It's a shame. That's such a shame. He was the person who inspired me to get into politics."

Ferguson is the President for the Alaska Federation of Natives.

Nusunginya's daughter, Patsy, says she remembers her father predicting long before the Prudhoe oil deposits were discovered that there would be development of the North Slope oil and mineral deposits. She said he also predicted the establishment of a school and construction of an airport and a road to the

North Slope. Those predictions came true in a big way.

Mrs. Aamodt said her father always told his family "if you believe that you are right, then you should stick to what you believe in. Don't sell yourself short for anything."

She says her father was the kind of person who "would not be pushed aside if he believed in something." If there was a law that discriminated against his

people or did not include his people, he made sure it was changed or got rid of it."

She says he was a strong believer in education. "Even when he was really sick he went to the graduation ceremony when I got my master's degree in public school administration. He encouraged me to get my doctorate."

Nusunginya is survived by his mother, Faye, Barrow, by his

daughters, Beverly Long, Patsy Aamodt, Marie Huddell, Lucille Leavitt and Helen Nusunginya, all of Barrow, and sons Tom and John Jr., both of Barrow.

He also is survived by his brothers, Ronald, Nenana, Don, Percy, both Barrow, and sisters, Mary Edwardsen, Mabel Panigeo, Edna Rice, and Sally Brower, all Barrow.

He was a member of the Barrow Assembly of God Church.