

Roy Peratrovich: Coping with Bureaucracy

Description



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Governor Gruening (seated) signs the anti-discrimination act of 1945. Alaska Territorial Governors. Witnessing are (left to right) O. D. Cochran, Elizabeth Peratrovich, Edward Anderson, Norman Walker, and Roy Peratrovich. Image: Amy Lou Blood – Ordway’s. Credit: Alaska State Library – Historical Collections.

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by Donn Liston, Daily News Staff Writer

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Sometimes you just can't win when you're dealing with the bureaucracy, according to Roy Peratrovich.

And even when you're winning, you lose. At least, that's the way Roy Peratrovich, Anchorage Bureau of Indian Affairs superintendent, must feel.

Anyone who knows Roy will tell you he's a straight shooter. He sits square at his desk and looks you square in the eyes. He doesn't pull any punches but when he can do something for his Alaska Native people, Roy will knock himself out trying.

Some time ago a memorandum was addressed to Roy, through Clay Antioquia, Juneau area director, from Morris Thompson, Bureau of Indian Affairs commissioner in Washington. The correspondence explained "objections have been raised at your assisting Alaska Natives in filing claims with the Bureau of Land Management and thereafter representing claimants before the Interior Board of Land Appeals and the Office of Hearing and Appeals."

The memo goes on to explain that the objections were based on the superintendent's efforts acting as an attorney in prosecuting claims against the United States and working as counsel for the Department of Interior without permission. Both were alleged violations of specific laws.

Representatives from Interior agencies met last March 14 to study the problem and determine what to do about alleged violations. Peratrovich was told nothing of the objections or the meeting.

Nobody wants to admit who complained about Peratrovich's efforts. But to keep the intra-agency strife to a minimum, the BIA is attempting to secure funds to hire private counsel in the prosecution of future claims. Until then, Peratrovich has been authorized to assist claimants as long as they are given written notice that he is not really an attorney.

When contacted about his new authorization, Peratrovich explained a new fact of the bureaucratic bungle. He says he never received the official memorandum from the commissioner and only knew of it second-hand. Now he has been given new authority, after a complaint he never knew of, on an issue he never knew was an issue.

"We appealed 81 allotments and we were upheld on all appeals in the Washington office," Peratrovich said, adding: "After 33 years in federal service, 26 of which were in BIA, nothing surprises me."

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