

Veto overrides important to grants, loan programs

By Alaska Sen. Frank Ferguson
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Work on legislation and the budget has been progressing very rapidly since the Legislature went into session on Jan. 11. Because of reductions in the state's oil revenues as well as federal budget cut-backs, very close scrutiny is being paid by the Senate and House Finance Committees to any budget appropriations. As a member of the Senate Finance Committee, I have been appointed Chairman of the Subcommittees on Commerce & Economic Development and Community & Regional Affairs. These Subcommittees are important to my district in particular as well as rural Alaska as a whole.

On Jan. 15, the House and Senate met in joint session to

override several of the Governor's vetoes on last year's legislation. One override which was significant for the rural areas dealt with Senate Bill 559—relating to State grants. The final passage of Senate Bill 559 gives the State greater flexibility in awarding grants to non-profit corporations.

Senate Bill 629, which appropriates \$7 million in supplemental funds to the student loan program, has passed both houses of the Legislature and was signed by the Governor on Jan. 22. This legislation will give a great boost to the backlog of student applications that have not received action for the 1981-82 school year because of lack of monies in the loan fund.

The Senate Community & Regional Affairs Committee,

on which I serve, has held extensive hearings throughout the summer on Senate Bill 180 which relates to Title 29—municipalities. I am proposing some amendments to this bill which will allow the North Slope Borough more time to select state lands and to select state land even though they have a lawsuit pending against the State. In addition, my proposed amendments will allow industrial sites in the North Slope Borough to be used for census counts in levying and collecting oil and gas taxes and for revenue sharing.

The Senate unanimously passed Senate Bill 119 on Jan. 26. This bill will make the school districts responsible for informing teachers of the housing situation within villages, as

well as assisting teachers in securing reasonable housing in villages.

One important clause of the bill allows teachers to break their contracts without losing their teaching certificates if they leave their school within one month because acceptable housing is not available. Hopefully, this legislation will reduce teacher turnover and improve teacher satisfaction with their posts in the rural areas.

For the past week, I have been meeting with other members of the Alaska Federation of Natives delegation and Uni-

versity of Alaska officials in trying to work out a good delivery system for rural post-secondary education which has been a sore point with many rural residents. A follow-up meeting is scheduled for February 1.

I have sponsored Senate Bill 665 which provides a supplemental appropriation of \$1.5 million for weatherization. This appropriation will fund a team of local residents to provide caulking, storm windows, and other insulation for elderly and low income people's homes.