

# Rural Unorganized Boroughs May Be Basis for New Rural Government

Rural Alaska will have a new form of government and money for improvements if a bill now in the Alaska House passes.

The proposal is currently in the House Health, Education and Welfare Committee where it reportedly received favorable testimony at a public hearing last week.

The measure would create new entities called regional unorganized boroughs out of what is now known as the unorganized borough of Alaska.

Presently, all areas of the state not within the boundaries of any of Alaska's 10 organized boroughs are part of the unorganized borough. The ten boroughs are centered around the following cities or areas: Bristol Bay, Fairbanks, Anchorage, Juneau, Sitka, Haines, Kenai Peninsula, Ketchikan, Kodiak Island and Matanuska Valley.

Thus, most of rural Alaska is placed in the unorganized borough, where any form of government has, for the most part, been nonexistent. According to the State constitution, the legislature is supposed to meet as the assembly for this borough.

However, economist Greg Erickson of the University of Alaska reminded the committee at the hearing that the legislature has not met once in this capacity and has failed to carry out its responsibility in rural Alaska.

According to the House bill, boundaries would be drawn for the regional unorganized boroughs with consideration for the desires and wishes of the residents of the proposed boroughs, existing Alaskan Native associations, regional boards and corporations, land claims settlement areas and existing ethnic and fraternal groupings.

A regional council would be elected with the power to decide how the borough will spend its money.

As stated in the measure, the council shall "prepare, review and approve the budget of the regional unorganized borough."

Also, it would review and approve all state agency plans which affect its development and welfare. It would prepare and submit the priorities and needs of the communities and people living in the borough and would coordinate federal and state activities with regional and local programs.

To assist the regional boroughs and existing municipalities, a Department of Regional and Community Affairs would be created with a commissioner of regional and community affairs at its head.

Revenue for the new boroughs, as well as the already existing boroughs, would come from a fund composed of 40 per cent of all state revenues derived from the sale, lease or disposition of natural resources.

Half of the 40 per cent would be distributed to each borough on the basis of population.

The other half would be allocated in terms of the degree to which a borough's average per capita income falls below the average for the state.

Furthermore, 10 per cent of the total money going to each unorganized regional borough in proportion to their respective populations.

Under the bill, the Local Affairs Agency, the Rural Develop-

ment Agency, the Alaska Planning and Research Division and the planning assistance authority of the Alaska State Housing Authority would be transferred to the new department.

At the hearing some objection was raised to the fact that the powers of taxation were not allowed to the proposed boroughs.

Rep. John Sweet, R-Anchorage, said he felt that everyone ought to pay part of their share no matter how small.

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