

ARCTIC BOROUGH APPROVED

Borough Hailed 'New Challenge, New Departure'

By NORMA BOWKETT
Staff Writer

In a move described by Byron Mallott, head of the State Local Affairs Agency, as a "really bold step," the State Local Boundary Commission voted last week in Anchorage to approve the petition calling for the establishment of a 50-million-acre first-class borough north of the Brooks Range.

"This is a real challenge and a new departure," Mallott told the Tundra Times in a telephone interview. With the "vast areas and scattered people, we need to develop local government mechanisms responsive to those circumstances. Hopefully, the North Slope Borough... will give the state a firm fix on how best to establish responsive local government in rural areas."

All that remains now before the North Slope Borough is a reality is the confirming vote of the residents of the Arctic area.

No one expects them to refuse this opportunity for self-government.

According to Joe Upicksoun, a resident of Barrow and president of the Arctic Slope Native Association (ASNA), when the Local Boundary Commission approved plans for the North Slope Borough, they "knew what they were doing."

"They did their homework," he said, in response to a query from the Tundra Times. "They knew the constitution and found that our application for the borough was constitutional."

Now, he said, he is trying to persuade "a few to run for borough offices."

Upicksoun would especially like to see Eben Hopson—special assistant to Governor William A. Egan and former state legislator—run for borough chairman, he said, "since he helped write

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the borough concept" into state law.

Very few people in Alaska understand the borough concept, Upicksoun said, but he thinks the people in his area see the idea of borough government as a means of bringing the government closer to home.

Approval of the proposed borough by the Local Boundary Commission came after nearly a year of study and some opposition.

According to Mallott, his agency received the petition for incorporation on April 6, 1971.

"We spent approximately four and one-half months studying the proposition," he said. "We made two separate trips to the slope, visited every community, visited the oil companies at Prudhoe Bay, and commissioned Peat, Marwick and Mitchell, a national accounting firm, to do an independent study as to the financial resources available to the proposed borough."

His agency's "whole study," he said, was "exhaustive."

Prior to the Local Boundary Commission's hearing in Barrow on Dec. 2—a hearing attended by 350 people—the Local Affairs Agency issued a report to the commission informing them that "in our considered opinion the proposed borough met the standards for incorporation" spelled out in the Alaska statutes, "although the physical size" of this borough "was not found anywhere in the United States," said Mallott.

Some oil companies were in opposition to the petition for incorporation, Mallott said, because they felt that "the Prudhoe Bay oil field was a self-sufficient kind of entity and didn't require local government." Oil companies, he said, advocated a state tax too, rather than having a local government "preempt the tax base."

But, he said, under the new borough, the some 3,500 residents of the North Slope area will have "the capability to de-

termine how the land is utilized" and will be "able to tax taxable property at Prudhoe Bay areas as well as throughout the rest of the borough."

During the past few weeks some Alaskans feared that Governor Egan's proposed legislation for dividing the unorganized borough of the state into smaller units and providing for a uniform taxation on them would adversely affect the petition for incorporation of the North Slope Borough.

State Senator Willie Hensley of Kotzebue expressed this fear when he took the floor of the Senate on January 21 to ask the Alaska State Legislature to "defer any consideration of a tax bill for the unorganized borough..." until after the State Local Boundary Commission meeting on the subject in Anchorage on February 24, 25 and 26.

His fears were unfounded.

Such legislation described in the Governor's State of the State message has now been introduced in the Alaska State Legislature and referred to committee for consideration, but the Local Boundary Commission made the decision to approve the petition for the borough on the third day of their meeting in Anchorage, following what Mallott describes as a "thorough review of the record and the file developed over the course of the past year."

"Friday morning," he said, commission members took each of the standards for incorporation of a borough "one by one to determine whether or not the proposal met them."

In the afternoon, he said, they "voted to approve the petition for the first class borough, but not as submitted by ASNA."

According to Mallott, the commission approved only the three mandatory powers which first class boroughs are required to assume—education, planning and zoning and property taxation—but left other powers such as police, fire protection and sewer and water for the local area to determine because commission members "felt they did not have sufficient information as to get a firm fix on all kinds of local powers borough residents would wish to assume in a short time."

Will the size of the borough present problems?

"Communities on the North Slope, in many respects are much more closely knit in social and cultural ties...and (residents) are able to get about more than many others," Mallott replied.

In fact, he said, "in our study we found...it to be a provable fact...that when people on the North Slope have to get around, they have always been able to get there."

During the course of his agency's study of the petition, Mallott said, he tried to keep an open mind as to whether or not the North Slope Borough should

be approved.

But, he said, he became "a proponent of it" after his agency work was done.

"I applauded" the decision of the Local Boundary Commission, he said. "I think it's a really bold step and a real challenge."

Residents of the proposed borough live, for the most part, in five villages—Point Hope, Barrow, Wainwright, Anaktuvuk Pass and Kaktovik.

The next step in their plan for incorporation will be for Lieutenant Governor H.A. "Red" Boucher—once he has received the official report from the Local Boundary Commission—to set a date for a public election for residents of the proposed borough to have their say in the matter.

Boucher said today that although his office has not yet received formal notification of the Local Boundary Commission's decision, he has "set up meetings with his Director of Elections, Dorothy MacKenzie, for this afternoon to discuss the procedures "for carrying out the work involved in completing the election "at the earliest possible date."

In the next few days, he said, Mrs. MacKenzie, as overseer of the election will be meeting with Lil Angerman and Joann Harhut, since they are responsible for overseeing elections in the Interior and in the Nome area, to "get on with" the election.

He foresees no difficulty, Boucher says, and can make a rough guess that the entire process can be completed within 60 days, even though Alaska Statutes allow a total time period of 120 days.

"We intend to proceed immediately," he said.