

# *New hope for rural Headstart*

Headstart programs would be open to all pre-school children in small Alaska villages under legislation introduced recently by Senator Mike Gravel of Alaska.

The bill is intended to prevent the Department of Health Education and Welfare from excluding children whose families are not "poor" under Headstart's definition of poverty.

Gravel explained in introducing the bill, "In Alaska, the typical Headstart community has approximately 20 children. This represents the total preschool population in a given community. Three or four of those children may be over-income, therefore putting the Headstart community out of compliance with the regulations. However, the difficulty of excluding two children in a given community is obvious: these will be the only two children in the community who cannot attend Headstart.

Gravel said in many small villages, medical, dental and pre-school social services are only available through the Headstart program, even to the children of non-poor families.

Gravel quoted letters from parents and Headstart officials in Unalakleet, Chevak and Mountain Village supporting the intent of the legislation.

Under Gravel's bill, a village would qualify if it has less than 1,000 population, had no preschool program and no resident medical professional, had no reasonable access to these, and if at least 50 per cent of the families to be served meet Headstart's low income test.