

Education Fund would aid rural schools

by William G. Demmert

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JUNEAU — A recent *Tundra Times* editorial agreed that the Cowper administration's Education Fund would "firm up" funding for Alaska's public schools far into the future.

It is encouraging that the editorial twice expressed faith in the democratic process. Unfortunately, the editorial encourages legislators to reject the Education Fund before the public has a chance to vote on it.

What could be more democratic than allowing Alaskans to decide this important question for themselves at the ballot box?

The Education Fund would be a special savings account inside the Permanent Fund. The principal of both funds would never be touched. Only the money earned from investments — the interest — could be used. Our dividends would stabilize at about \$1,000 during the years the Education Fund is being built up.

I believe Alaska's rural communities need to support the Education Fund for a number of reasons. We've seen Alaska's education budget rise and fall with the price of oil. In 1986, the

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education budget was cut 10 percent as an emergency response to the oil crash on international markets. Schools lost valuable programs.

Without the firm funding base of the Education Fund, public education will be asked to give up more when state revenues are a billion dollars short of expenditures. This would be tragic at a time when we're beginning to find more effective ways of address-

ing the educational and social problems facing students, particularly minority and at-risk students.

Let's face it, some solutions are going to cost more money.

If Alaskans do not support the Education Fund, I worry that rural schools will be the first to suffer from budget reductions.

The editorial expressed faith in leaders "finding innovative solutions



to tough fiscal problems." That's just what the Education Fund is.

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In the final analysis, I say let the people decide. Let Alaskans go to the polls to vote on the Education Fund. This is how a democracy should work.