

Editorial



Restraint needed in SW Alaska

An extremely unfortunate situation is developing in Southwestern Alaska, where people in some villages are questioning the authority of the Alaska State Troopers to perform their duties.

These problems have surfaced most recently in Tununak and Quinhagak. In fact, Art English, commissioner of the Department of Public Safety, recently flew to Bethel in an attempt to explain that the Troopers' law enforcement responsibilities are not affected by sovereignty issues.

Capt. Glenn Godfrey, chief of Trooper rural enforcement services, which includes all of Western Alaska, told the *Tundra Times* that as an Alaska Native himself, he's really concerned about the Troopers' relationship to villagers. He's not just a law enforcement officer, he's also a human being who has a strong empathy for other Alaska Natives in rural areas.

Godfrey has worked very hard to develop ties with the people up and down the coast of Western Alaska. He's dedicated himself to offering the most humane enforcement of the law possible.

In fact, the Troopers' relationship has been so good with the people of the region that arrests are sometimes actually made over the phone.

Godfrey said the Troopers are compelled by state law to carry out their duties until the Alaska Constitution or state law is changed. And we believe that in most cases villagers welcome the Troopers as officials they call on in times of dire emergency.

We're also concerned about reports that could have the effect of fanning the flames in an already hot debate over sovereignty in Southwestern Alaska. Recent news stories, for example, made it sound as if six Troopers tried to arrest a suspect in Quinhagak. According to Godfrey, only two Troopers arrested the suspect, three were seeking another suspect and one was explaining to the village council the Troopers' reason for being in the village.

We believe this situation calls for a lot of restraint on everyone's part. Who's going to get hurt if the Troopers are impeded in doing their duty? It will be the rural people in villages, who may need to call on the Troopers because of a problem in the village.

We understand that the sovereignty issues are raising questions about all aspects of government in rural Alaska. Law enforcement, however, is the most basic level of service that must be provided.

It's one of the services that must be there in time of need.

