

# Gravel Says Electricity Possible Key to Village Development

Electricity in Alaska's villages—a possible key to development—could be provided through a large Rural Electrification Loan (REA) for financing electrical generating plants in small communi-

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ties and villages of the state.

State House Speaker Mike Gravel, campaigning against Ralph Rivers for the Democratic nomination to Congress Aug. 23, this week pledged himself to Alaska voters that if sent to Washington he would fight for approval of such an REA loan.

Also this week, Gravel told the Tundra Times that unless something was done to ease pressure on overcrowded high school facilities at the BIA's Mt. Edgecumbe High School, in four or five years the number of rural youths "lost" to society because of being denied an education would climb to between two and three thousand.

"I would like to see the establishment of a statewide electrical co-op to furnish electricity through REA financed facilities to all communities presently without electricity," Gravel said.

"Electricity has become one of the necessities of

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life and is essential to the economic development of the state," he said.

Flash freezer units planned for western Alaska villages proved unfeasible simply because complete electrical systems in the villages would have had to be constructed first, Gravel said, and financing for such electrical systems was not available.

"The lack of electricity has also kept private capital from developing fishery resources in western Alaska," the candidate pointed out, and such power could be provided through an REA loan that could be backed by the state.

"Many areas of the lower states were developed in this way," he added.

Gravel commented on recent education figures released that between 200 and 300 rural eighth-grade graduates will not be able to attend high school this fall because of crowded facilities at Mt. Edgecumbe.

The 200 to 300 figure came to light after recent publicity over five high school applications that were turned down, from the village of Kasigluk in southwestern Alaska.

Five eighth-graders from that village applied for the BIA's school at Mt. Edgecumbe, near Sitka, and were denied admittance because of lack of space.

Gravel said Monday that his figures showed closer to 400 rural youths being turned down each year.

Although the BIA will only officially quote 250, in many villages the BIA teacher will make applications for only his most promising students, knowing that he would be lucky enough to get those in school, even though many more may be eligible.

Gravel did research in rural education problems before introducing the 7-million dollar Regional High School bond issue legislation in Juneau last year.

Gravel's high-school legis-

lation would build regional schools in different areas of Alaska's bush and would take pressure off the BIA's Sitka facility.

The Speaker said that if the bond issue is approved by statewide voters this fall, the schools themselves could be built and ready to begin classes within two years.

"The real tragedy with the crowded Edgecumbe school," the Speaker said, "is that every year 300 to 400 youngsters are left sitting on the doorstep."

"The problem of education in Alaska is critical, and crowded BIA schools are truly a major roadblock to improving conditions in rural parts of the state."