

Legislators say budget cuts hit rural Alaska

Cowper criticized

by Geoff Kennedy
for the Tundra Times

Gov. Steve Cowper's \$325 million budget cuts hurt rural Alaskans directly and indirectly, three rural legislators say.

Budget cuts in Anchorage hit rural Alaskans hard, because rural Alaskans frequently travel to the state's largest city for services, said Rep. Eileen Panigeo MacLean, D-Barrow.

"I'm concerned about cuts in Anchorage," she said. "The cuts were not justifiable. I prefer cuts other than in human services."

Clare House, an Anchorage shelter for women and children, lost 48 percent of its local budget and may have to lay off five staff members, said Mike Guinn, the supervisor of the Grants and Contracts Section of the Department of Health and Human Services in Anchorage.

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The vetoes also severely affect three other Anchorage social services, Guinn said, including:

- McKinnel House, operated by the Salvation Army, which takes in entire families, lost \$226,500 and would have to lay off six and a half positions out of a total work force of eight.

- Bean's Cafe, which serves meals to the poor, lost \$189,262. The cuts would require laying off seven to nine workers and would limit meals to one a day.

- The Association of Stranded Rural Alaskans in Anchorage, which helps pay for trips back home for rural Alaskans in Anchorage, lost \$8,107, which would go directly for client service.

"ASRAA is one of the lifelines for rural Alaska," MacLean said.

She questioned Cowper's veto of \$1.9 million for the Barrow Group Home. That money comes from the federal National Petroleum Reserve Account, which provides funding for communities affected by the National Petroleum Reserve, she said.

MacLean objected to cuts of \$51,000 for Children's House, the Kotzebue day-care center; \$44,000 for the Maniilaq Career Program; and \$18,400 for the Chukchi College campus.

She also expressed concern about cuts in school debt retirement and the school foundation formula.

"He cut into the core of legislative discretion," said Sen. Jack Coghill, R-Nenana. "That's people money, not government money."

"He did not veto the 400 new employees or mid-management state employees," Coghill said. "The governor took the wrong approach."

The vetoes hit rural Alaska harder than the larger communities, because the governor cut many temporary jobs rural Alaskans need as a "nest egg" for the winter, Coghill said.

The governor should not have cut grants to rural Alaskans for two reasons: the federal government matches many of those grants and Native non-profit corporations such as Maniilaq and the Tanana Chiefs Conference deliver services more efficiently because their employees are more motivated than typical "nine-to-fivers," Coghill said.

Rep. Dick Shultz, R-Tok, said his constituents won't suffer from Cowper's operating budget vetoes, but capital projects vetoes hit them hard.

"He eliminated everything," Shultz said.

Shultz singled out a proposed new Healy Lake school that would have served 12 students.

"Very critical items were cut," Shultz said, "like life safety upgrades at Tetlin, where power lines are exposed."

The governor also eliminated Emergency Medical Service funds for eight or nine Interior Alaska communities, Shultz said.

He also complained about road maintenance cuts in his district.

"The Northway road is critical," Shultz said.

The governor's cuts affected the discretionary funds of all communities, he said.

"The guy's brain dead on that one. And you can put that in your newspaper," Shultz said.

Budget cuts in his district would hit a lot harder than cuts in Anchorage, he said.

"We're not talking about cake here."

Among the governor's cuts are:

- \$50,000 for a Pribilof film project.
- \$9,000 for the Kawerak Elders program.

- \$53,000 for the Nome Community Service Teen Program.

- \$44,000 for the Nome Eskimo Community Summer Youth Program.

- \$30,000 for a Nome water study.

- \$22,600 for the Northwest campus of the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

- \$20,000 for Association of Village Council Presidents waterfowl conservation.

- \$55,000 for Nunam Kitlutsisti environmental research.

maintenance.

- \$35,200 for the Kodiak Area Native Association cultural program.

- \$20,000 for Port Graham salmon enhancement.

- \$36,900 for Fairbanks Native Association economic development.

- \$45,000 for Tanana Chiefs Conference services for pregnant teenagers.

- \$135,200 for the Sealaska Heritage Foundation.

- \$19,000 for the Chilkoot Cultural Camp.

- \$56,100 for two Alaska Native Foundation programs.

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- \$98,900 for a Kuskokwim herring stock study.

- \$25,000 for the Kusko 300 sled dog race.

- \$76,200 for Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta foster care recruitment and support.

- \$54,900 for the Kuskokwim campus of the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

- \$30,000 for Naknek winter road

- \$96,600 for the Rural Alaska Community Action Program.

- \$2 million for rural airports.

- \$20,000 for the Rural Alaska Television Network.

- \$50,000 for an Inuit Studies Conference at UAF.

- \$100,000 for financial management assistance to local governments.

- \$3,643,800 for municipal assistance.