



AFN President Janie Leask:

## Votes for HB288 were votes for unity and good sense

Protecting the lifestyle of Alaska's rural residents is a life-time challenge, but every once in a while a hurdle is cleared and we can take a deep breath knowing once again that the rural Alaskan and Native lifestyle is protected.

Passage of a subsistence law a few weeks ago by the State Senate affords such an opportunity for a deep breath, for that law continues a rural use priority of Alaska's fish and game resources and keeps management of those resources in state hands.

Shortly before adjournment the Alaska Legislature passed HB 288, a bill which amends the 1978 subsistence law to give the Board of Fisheries and Board of Game the regulatory authority they possessed prior to the Alaska Supreme Court's decision in *Madison v. Alaska Department of Fish and Game*. HB 288 establishes a definition of "subsistence uses" which limits subsistence hunting and fishing to residents of rural Alaska who live in areas in which hunting and fishing for food is a principal characteristic of the local economy. Enactment of this definition eliminates the threat of federal government takeover of hunting and fishing on federal lands.

But passage of the bill also ensures that those who hunt for personal use — such as sport and commercial fishermen — are provided reasonable opportunities to do so.

Unfortunately passage of this law does not put the subsistence controversy to rest. The same small, but very vocal group of Alaskans who opposed enactment of the law in 1978, who organized the initiative to repeal the law which was overwhelmingly rejected by the voters in 1982, and who opposed the enactment of HB 288, can be expected to move their fight against the law back into the courts.

Even so, the vote in favor of HB 288 indicates that the vast majority of Alaskans believe that subsistence has been a divisive issue too long. The time has come to make a fresh start toward quieting the rhetoric and bringing Alaskans together again. Passage of HB 288 is an important first step in that direction.

AFN, rural residents and all Alaska Natives should join together in applauding the 13 state senators who voted to maintain the rural subsistence priority. By doing so the senators effectively decided that Alaska should continue to manage its resources rather than allowing the federal government to do so.

The majority of senators, by voting for rural priority, avoided a further polarization of the state which would have pitted Natives and non-Natives against one another. Those senators resisted the urgings of those who would have amplified our differences and therefore mended a severe breach that was developing in state politics.

Those senators voted for unity, good sense and for trying to work out the issues of fish and game management in Alaska without federal interference.

Once again, as in 1982 after the statewide subsistence vote, we hope the passage of this legislation will lay the subsistence issue to rest.