

Sheffield congratulates Cowper

by Jill McGuire
for the Tundra Times

Gov. Bill Sheffield made his way through the crowd that came to the William A. Egan Civic and Convention Center last week to watch

the election of a governor.

He gave the obligatory TV interviews. He shook hands and seemed at ease. Mostly, he said he came to be with friends, political people

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Steve Cowper, joined by his wife Michael and Lt. Gov. Stephen McAlpine, enjoys his victory election night

photo by Norris Klesman

Sheffield says he likes a good political fight

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who had helped him over the years.

Sheffield, along with an estimated 2,000 people milling about the cavernous convention center, said he couldn't resist being on hand to witness the climax of a tough and bitter campaign between Republican Arliss Sturgulewski and Democrat Steve Cowper, the man who soundly defeated Sheffield just two months ago in the Democratic primary.

The governor, who survived impeachment proceedings last year, said he just plain liked a good political fight.

Almost all the titans of Alaska politics were present at the convention center election night. Sheffield chatted amiably with Walter Hickel, Congressman Don Young and U.S. senatorial candidate Glenn Olds.

Unlike Sheffield, the three frequently would look over at the large white boards and watch vote counts being posted next to their names.

Conspicuously absent from the festivities was Cowper, the "High Plains Drifter" from Fairbanks.

Cowper opted to spend the evening with his family and close advisors at the Anchorage Hilton

Hotel.

By 12:30 a.m., he led Sturgulewski by 5,000 votes, and the media were declaring him the next governor. The crowd was anxious to see and touch the newly elected chief executive, and for awhile, Sheffield disappeared into the crowds.

Around 1 a.m., when many people were giving up on any chance of Cowper, the former district attorney and legislator made his entrance.

Accompanied by a vocal band of supporters, Cowper came out of seclusion and made his way through the lobby to a downstairs hospitality

room overflowing with his supporters. He began a speech, thanking well-wishers for their support through a long and difficult campaign.

Suddenly, he spotted Sheffield standing beside the stage. The two long-time rivals stared at each other briefly. Sheffield stepped forward to shake Cowper's hand. The two men embraced. The room erupted.

Moments later, Sheffield retreated to a vehicle parked outside, away from the celebration. Few took notice, as the television crews scrambled to interview the new governor of Alaska.