

Nelson Stresses Education in Legislative race

By BILL HESS
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During her campaign to take over the Alaska House seat now held by Al Adams, June Nelson plans to stress the importance of education, the need for more recreational facilities in the Northwest Arctic, subsistence and economic development in line with public wishes.

"Education is always a big issue," she explains. "It is close to everyone's heart. I have long been involved in education. Now I see that for the first time, monies for education have been cut from the state budget. I am an advocate of 100 percent funding for education!"

Nelson points to her 18 years of service on the Northwest Arctic School District school board, the last six in

an elected position, as evidence of her concern for education. She also has served on the State Board of Education, and feels her early involvement with the issue of local control played a big role in the passage of the bill which led to Rural Education Attendance Areas being established.

Even before bi-lingual and cross-cultural education became political issues, says Nelson, she was working to get them included in school curriculums across the state of Alaska. "Now, these programs are in the schools," she adds.

Nelson does not believe that her opponent has done all he could for education. "The finance chairmanship is a very powerful position. I think he was in a perfect position to deliver to our area, but, looking at the record, he didn't

deliver! I think our rural area lost out!"

Nelson points to a bond bill which Gov. Jay Hammond vetoed which she feels would have led to improvements not only in education, but also in rural water and sewer systems, and airport facilities.

"The governor had warned time and time again that he would veto the bond bill. I think he (Adams) was in a good position to do something about it."

Nelson says she will seek state monies to help establish more rural recreation programs. "I really feel strongly that it is important to both young and old to have recreational programs for their mental and physical well-being," she stresses. "Until we really put some money into well-planned facilities, be they swimming pools, bowling alleys, whatever, we're going to keep having the same social problems.

"People go to the bar because there's no place else to go." Nelson says she would work toward helping villages and cities establish programs according to their needs and wants.

Nelson also opposes the subsistence repeal initiative. "Naturally, I do not want federal intervention into our fish and game. I'm not in favor of repealing the subsistence law. There is room for change, but that has to be through the legislative process."

Nelson feels that without subsistence, many Alaskan villages could not possibly support their people.

A wealth of natural resources foreshadows big changes in the Northwest Arctic. "I'm in favor of development, as long as it is in tune with the wishes of the people. If it is done with their involvement, if it is their decision. I am not in favor of just developing to make money."

Nelson emphasizes that she was born and raised in Kotzebue, has six children, and speaks Inupiaq. "I have a very good grasp of the issues. I will represent the people."

Nelson says her main reason for running is to give the people a choice. "When you have more than one candidate, it brings out the best, it makes the candidates more responsible. In our area, for years the people have not been given the opportunity to have a choice.

"So there has never been the opportunity for the people to become aware of the issues. Consequently, our people are often not familiar with some of the most critical issues facing us." Nelson admits that being in an isolated location where historically there has been little media, it is not easy to get information out.

Yet, she says she will use radio, tv, newspapers and mail-out pamphlets as best as is possible to pass information around. Nelson anticipates a clean fight, despite strong differences in a community where practically everyone knows just about everybody else. Whoever wins, she says, will be better off for the competition, and will have the support of the other.

Nelson served on the city council of Kotzebue for 15 years, and has been a member of the board of the KIC Village Corporation since it began.