

# We should care

One of the few new things we learned at the recent televised gubernatorial debates is that none of our candidates for governor gives one loud hoot for what people in the Lower 48 think of Alaska.

One-by-one, the four candidates - Fink, Randolph, Vogler and Sheffield - declared loudly and proudly that they don't care what people "Outside" think of how we spend our money. That's our business, they said thumping their collective chests.

Alaskans have for a long time held this philosophy and in the days of past poverty and living-off-the-land, we were able to better enjoy that freedom to be obnoxiously different. But our state has entered a new era when we are constantly being cast in a money-green limelight and the perception that many "Outsiders" have of us is very important, especially if those Outsiders are congressmen and federal officials.

Congress, after all, sets tax rates and establishes oil deductions that can mean millions of dollars in the state coffer - or the loss of that same money. And federal officials make decisions and recommendations on which federal programs get continued and where and for how much.

Senator Ted Stevens knows perhaps better than anyone from this state the effect that a bad perception about our wealth can have on appropriations bills and program support.

He repeatedly has warned us that to go spending our money frivolously can lead to a backlash of non-support in Congress that will mean that far less money will come to the state than is now.

One example of this backlash is the recent attempt by a senator from Ohio to make Alaska pay to assume control of the Alaska Railroad. The line would be scrapped by the federal government if we didn't take it over, there is nothing else that can be done with it.

But, because this Ohio Senator feels we are "rolling in petro dollars," we should pay for it. Others have supported massive program cutbacks in our state because they feel the state government has the money to pick up and pay for those programs - and it doesn't. What they don't know or choose to ignore is that the state doesn't have all that much money and hasn't or won't pick the programs up.

Our loyal opposition outside doesn't seem to care that we need water and sewers in villages, that we have massive transportation problems and that we, too, have a large problem with unemployment in the state.

They see only petro dollars and believe that the money that Alaska is now benefiting from comes directly from the cash they pay at their gas station in Iowa and Ohio.

If enough such public people believe this and bring enough pressure to bear, Alaska could once again find itself with little, if any, oil revenue. More federal programs that we are entitled to will be cut because of this misconception.

Thus, we feel that while we should maintain our individuality we also believe that we cannot afford to operate in a vacuum merrily espousing a "the heck-with-them" philosophy.

We wish that our gubernatorial candidates and the man who finally takes office would remember that we are all part of the United States and we can't simply thumb our noses or we'll be in for a fight we just might lose.