

Praise for sobriety leadership

We would like to salute the truly inspired leadership of Dewey Skan, president of the Rural Alaska Community Action Program. Skan skillfully chaired the Village Participation Conference in Juneau the last week in March, kept things right on or ahead of schedule, graciously welcomed speakers and surprise visitors and leavened the important proceedings with humor.

On at least two awkward and painful occasions, he rose to a task often neglected by others. Upon receiving reports of a drinking bout by a couple of conference participants the night before which had not only damaged property but the serenity of the conference, Skan took the microphone and condemned the lapse. Sternly, but without rancor, he invoked the zero-tolerance policy of the organization, challenging participants to secure the benefits of adherence for themselves and the group as a whole. His remarks were brief, uncompromising and completely appropriate.

The next day, during a presentation by Gov. Tony Knowles, a conference participant showing some sign of intoxication made a loud, challenging remark to the chief executive. Skan quickly left the head table and quietly confronted the speaker, who left, thereby restoring decorum.

To some, these actions might seem harsh. Certainly, it is not an easy thing to interrupt the kind of behavior that stems from alcohol and drug abuse. We suggest that our discomfort at the kind of leadership displayed by Mr. Skan is a sure sign that it was exactly the right thing to do, signaling the greater responsibility we all must take to ensure drug and alcohol free forums in which to deliberate our future.