

Editorial Comment—

Name-Calling in Alaska Politics

At the recent Democratic Central Committee Convention in Fairbanks, State Sen. Willie Hensley (D-Kotzebue) issued a challenge to Jack Coghill, chairman of the Alaska State Republican Party, to "clean up" his politics. The challenge was the result of a recent article in the Anchorage Daily News in which Coghill called Gov. William A. Egan a "name," Hensley said.

The senator did not mention what the "name" was because, as he explained to a reporter later, he assumed most people in Fairbanks had seen the article. What the GOP chairman called the governor is not the issue here. The important thing is that Hensley put himself on record as being against name-calling. We are proud that a Native legislator has sounded the first alarm in this campaign against such tactics.

The time is at hand for voters to look askance at politicians who base their bids for re-election on how "bad" the other guy is. Democrats and Republicans have long done this to one another as well as to themselves. But an incumbent's performance in office is something that the mature voter is obligated to make a judgment on himself. The voter should not have to rely on an opposing candidate whose views often are prejudiced by his ambitions. Legitimate, fact-supported charges by one candidate against another are essential to our political process, but empty, rhetorical accusations have had their day.

The events of Watergate have put voters in a stern, no-nonsense frame of mind. Personal claims to morality — as opposed to someone else's immorality — are not what the people want to hear. Let incumbents and would-be incumbents demonstrate virtue by their acts, not their tongues. Natives, especially, are faced with problems and challenges of every sort. They cannot afford the artificial eloquence now beginning to surface in the political conventions. They need leaders with answers and effective approaches to the challenges ahead.

As a powerful voting block in Alaska today, it is incumbent upon Natives to take an incisive look into what the candidates really stand for, not just what they say they stand for. Native voters should be wary of the candidate who spends too much time putting down his opponent rather than coming up with genuine solutions to Native problems.