

Attitudes of commission may prevent input

People are not by their nature boat rockers. It seems to be human nature that a person will put up with many things before speaking out and then the complaints often are registered with a quaver of fear in the throat.

This is especially the case when it comes to complaining to the boss about the job and is certainly the case when it comes to going over the boss' head.

Because of this fact, the state Blue Ribbon Commission on discrimination in the state personnel act, was formed to seek out and stop discrimination against minorities and women by state government employers.

That highly touted panel met in Anchorage last week to obtain first-hand information on discrimination and found less than 15 people attending the hearing and fewer than 10 willing to speak. Of those, no one spoke of a current, first-hand experience of discrimination.

After listening to the commission it is little wonder. First of all, the wrong meeting day was advertised in the Anchorage daily newspapers. And, the advertisements were put in those paper only five days before the meeting.

Anyone who has lived in Alaska for any length of time knows how long it can take a newspaper to get to the Bush.

Secondly, and we feel more importantly, is the manner in which commission business is conducted.

Sen. Bill Ray of Juneau was chairman for the meeting and throughout the course of what testimony there was, we found a chairman who loved to debate. Ray interrupted witnesses, made jokes, changed the subject, argued with and generally caused the persons testifying to lose their composure.

During the afternoon session of the commission, a woman told Ray that it was no wonder that no people came to testify because of the way in which she was being treated. The word was rude. Another told a reporter that she wouldn't testify and face that kind of treatment.

To set the record straight, Sen. Ray has been a supporter of true equal rights and the end to bigotry of all kinds.

He often has called employers to discuss the complaints of persons who have contacted him privately. He has taken the step to examine his past and the attitudes imparted to him by his upbringing. Which is why we find his conduct during the hearing so puzzling.

During one sharp interchange between Ray and a witness, Ray told the witness that when Ray stopped talking and stopped asking questions it meant he wasn't listening. That may be the case but certainly there is a place and a time for everything and we are forced to agree with some of the witnesses, that anyone who had come to the meeting to testify would easily be turned off by the treatment which, however well intentioned, bordered on ridicule.

Senator Ray of all people should know how difficult it is for anyone to get up and speak to a group, especially a state commission of such apparent high caliber.

The commission certainly would be better informed if witnesses were able to simply answer questions instead of defend themselves against a barrage of brusque questions.