

UA decisions should include rural input

Another important decision is about to be made at the University of Alaska, and we would like to help out.

This week, the university's governing Board of Regents will discuss the last stages of selecting a permanent Chancellor of Community Colleges, Extension and Rural Education. A seven-man search committee has been screening applicants for the position and last week submitted a list of four candidates to Chief University Administrator Foster Diebold. Diebold is presently carrying out the duties of university president since the unexpected resignation of Dr. Neil Humphrey late last year.

Dr. Patrick O'Rourke, formerly head of Kuskokwim Community College, has served as Acting Chancellor of Community Colleges, etc., since the position was created as part of a university reorganization. The reorganization, if not spawned by serious financial and managerial difficulties at the university, at least became critical after those difficulties were revealed.

Prior to reorganization, the university established the position of vice-president for rural education affairs, a post filled first and last by Elaine Ramos. Ramos ran afoul of a firmly entrenched, conservative university administration which seemed to have no room for her style of program management. The battle for reinstatement as EVP that she waged after her rude and abrupt removal contributed significantly to the discovery of extensive problems throughout the university system.

As the dust settled after Ramos' losing battle, it became apparent that the Board of Regents had something in mind for rural education besides an executive vice president. Last fall the Board approved a plan that created the positions of Chancellor of Community Colleges, Extension and Rural Education, a Vice Chancellor of Extension and Rural Education and a Dean of Rural Education.

Some Native spokesmen fear that under the current plan, rural education will be forced to take a back seat to older, more secure community college extension programs. They argue that elimination of the position of EVP for Rural Education, a position with direct access to the presidents of the university system, considerably lengthens the distance between the people supposedly being served by rural ed programs and the officials who must go to Juneau and convince the state legislature to appropriate sufficient funds to REA to make the programs work.

The current plan of the university to carry out its mandate to deliver higher education to the bush is untested, but we are convinced that the plan doesn't have a prayer if the university administration doesn't pick a chancellor who can balance managerial ability with a strong identity with the needs and desires of rural Alaskans.

We have been assured by UA Administrator Diebold that a chancellor who will oversee rural education programs will not be picked before the public, including the rural public, has had a chance to look the candidates over. Although Diebold cautioned that there is precious little money for the candidates to travel throughout the state to meet the people, we would like to suggest another way to expose the candidates to the public eye: a televised question and answer program with all four finalists conducted by a moderator and three or four reporters. Such a format to determine the candidates' knowledge of Alaska, their sympathy with local policy direction, their willingness to do battle with tight-fisted legislators and competing programs on behalf of rural education, could easily be carried out in Anchorage or Fairbanks and would only require one trip for the candidates.

We strongly urge the Board of Regents to act favorably on this idea, or some reasonable facsimile, at their Fair-

banks meeting this week.

We are not attempting to turn the selection of a chancellor into a media circus or to remove the prerogative of appointment from the hands of those who are charged with such duties. But we do feel that confidence in university operations could be restored in some significant measure by including the public in some of the decisions critical to the university's future.

J.R.R.