

Wright's subsistence strategy: Leave it alone

by Geoff Kennedy

for the Tundra Times

Editor's note: This is the seventh in a series of articles the Tundra Times will be running on candidates for governor and lieutenant governor.

"Nothing. Leave it alone."

That's Republican gubernatorial candidate Don Wright's strategy on how to deal with Alaska's subsistence controversy.

The state should simply comply with

ELECTION '90

federal law, which guarantees subsistence rights for rural Alaskans, he said. As governor, Wright would effect compliance "administratively" instead of passing a law, changing the constitution or calling a special session, he said.

"Calling a special session is

stupid," he said. "They ought to call a special session (just) to teach people the constitution."

Wright calls the state's executive, legislative and judicial branches of government "bigoted" because, he says, they fail to recognize that the state constitution requires Alaska to conform to federal law, which ensures sovereign tribal rights.

"The (state) constitution has a disclaimer clause," which means, he said, "It's unconstitutional for the state

to pass anything repugnant to federal law and federal statutes."

All politicians swear to uphold both state and federal constitutions, he said.

The 1990 Legislature failed to replace the subsistence law the state Supreme Court declared unconstitutional last December. Gov. Steve Cowper predicts a special session to prepare a constitutional amendment for a vote of the people this November, but Cowper said last

continued on page six

• Wright would 'open the country' with roads

continued from page one

month he doesn't yet have the votes to make such a session feasible.

Asked how he would cope with declining revenues, Wright said he wouldn't have to cope with such a situation.

Predictions of a decline in revenues as Prudhoe Bay oil reserves diminish are a "false cry of wolf" by major industries to scare the people of Alaska," he said. "There's plenty of oil, coal, fish and timber."

Alaska's abundant natural resources will eliminate the need to impose a personal income tax, raid the Permanent Fund earnings, cut aid to local governments or cut the state work force, he said.

But, as governor, he would cut what he considers worthless state employees, particularly a number of assistant attorneys general.

He called the Department of Law "the most corrupt in the state."

As governor, he would retain the Rural Alaska Television Network and the Power Cost Equalization Program. And he would raise the \$250-a-month longevity bonus payments to keep up with inflation.

Wright would develop the economy of rural Alaska by promoting hydroelectric power plants and highways and upgrading airports throughout the state.

The Rampart Dam, proposed for Interior Alaska three decades ago, would be environmentally perfect, he said.

"We wouldn't have to burn fossil fuels. All industry could be electrified," he said. "Alaska would be a model for hydro for the world. It would create permanent jobs all over the state."

Wright would upgrade and widen the Dalton Highway from Fairbanks

to Prudhoe Bay. And he would build a network of roads to Nome, Kotzebue, Bethel and other communities to "open the country."

The state can build roads without spending exorbitant amounts of money, he said, as long as it avoids relying too much on the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, which he regards as one of the most expensive bureaucracies in the state.

"Build roads with men, women and equipment," he said, "and don't build on permafrost."

Every small airport in the state should be upgraded to handle Hercules aircraft and jets, if necessary, he said.

He would also make medical insurance available to everyone and make everyone's primary place of residence exempt from property taxes.

Finally, the state should make land available to all residents, although stumpage and surface royalties from the land would remain the state's, he said.

The money from all these programs would come from development of the state's natural resources, he said.

"In a place like Alaska, there's no need to tax the people," he said.

Wright has no plans to add or expand any other social services to rural Alaska.

"I don't make promises I can't keep," he said.

His closing comment:

"If the people of this state want a unified state, then they ought to vote Wright."

Wright, 60, a Gwich'in Athabaskan, lives in Fairbanks, where he graduated from Main High School. He's married and has five children and 12 grandchildren.

He's running for governor for the fifth time, the third time as a

Republican. He ran as a Democrat in 1974 and as Alaskan Independence Party candidate in 1978.

He was a charter organizer of the Alaska Federation of Natives and its first elected first vice president in 1968. He served as AFN president in 1971-72.

He was a charter member of the National Tribal Chairman's Association and the Alaska representative to the

National Congress of American Indians.

He spent a year and a half as a chief negotiator for the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and took 38 round trips from Alaska to Washington, D.C., during that time.

He was an alternate delegate to the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago and has run for Congress and the state Senate.