

# OPERATION MAINSTREAM TIFF

## Flap Develops Over OEO Program Between RurAL-CAP and State

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What is considered to be one of the best programs of the Rural Alaska Community Action Program (RurAL CAP) by its director will, in all likelihood, soon be turned over to the State—but not without questioning.

The program referred to is Operation Mainstream, a \$180,000 effort funded by the U.S. Department of Labor. It is designed to provide money for community improvement projects and, at the same time, useful job training for villagers.

For the past two years the program has been administered by the community action program RurAL CAP.

However, the U.S. Department of Labor recently gave the Alaska Department of Labor control over Operation Mainstream with the prerogative to operate the program itself or to delegate it to another agency.

And, in meetings March 9 and 10, the Manpower Advisory Board voted to recommend that

Operation Mainstream be handled by the State rather than RurAL CAP.

The recommendation, according to State Commissioner of Labor Thomas Moore, must still be approved by the Manpower Training Division of the Alaska Department of Labor and the Department of Labor. But, he seemed fairly certain that such approval would be automatic.

If so, the program will be operated by the State's Rural Development Agency as soon as the federal money comes through.

The executive director of RurAL CAP, Byron Mallott, ex-

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# Operation Mainstream

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pressed concern that, in the shift, plans drawn up by the villages for 1970-71 not be ignored by the State.

He added that he is drafting a letter to Gov. Keith Miller to ask that the State use priorities that have already been developed by villages and approved by regional boards.

There has been no indication from the State of what it will do, he said.

Commissioner Moore said he was sure that there will be participation of the villages in the 1970-71 program, but did not elaborate.

By way of explanation, under RurAL CAP, money for the program has gone directly to the villages and with it they have financed community development projects which they felt to be important.

Local people were hired to do the work, and, as a result, villages were improved and villagers received training that could be used in other jobs.

From 300-400 villagers received such training last year, according to RurAL CAP.

And, some of the villages have new community halls. Copper Center has a telephone network, and Goodnews Bay has new bridges, to name a few.

In preparation for 1970-71's, the villages drafted a program for Operation Mainstream and set priorities for future projects they felt to be the most important.

And, RurAL CAP plans to insist that these priorities be used and will encourage the villages and regional boards to do likewise.

The reasons behind the advisory board's decision to shift the program appear to be uncertain.

When questioned one board member said that he himself was not certain why the program was transferred. He added that from the presentation given by RurAL CAP and Rural Development Agency representatives appeared before the board.

The action, it seems, will certainly diminish the impact of RurAL CAP in its broad fight against poverty and make the State Rural Development Agency \$180,000 more powerful in its sponsorship of community improvement projects in rural Alaska.

According to Moore, there was a feeling on the part of the board that the shift would result in better cooperation between

public and private agencies and improved fiscal control.

It would be easier, he explained, for the State to exercise tight fiscal control over the program if it is administered by a State agency.

The RurAL CAP director termed the aspect of fiscal control "utter nonsense."

In a two-year period, he said, RurAL CAP has made Operation Mainstream into one of its best programs and has had no problems with fiscal control.

"We have as tight fiscal control, as the State will have," he said while mentioning that the agency has worked under stringent federal controls and guidelines.

He stressed that he did not object to the state operating the program and said that the State ought to operate such programs if it has the capacity.

His objections, he said, centered on the statement concerning fiscal control, mentioned above, and on the manner in which the board arrived at its decision and the responsiveness of the board to the manpower needs of rural Alaska.

Concerning the board's decision, Mallott said that he understood that the final vote was done in executive session with the public excluded and that he felt decisions on public funds should be made in the public eye.

Also, he said that one of the board members had been pressured by a member of the governor's staff to vote for state operation of the program.

Concerning the board itself, Mallott said that he felt the composition of the board did not make it totally responsive to the manpower needs of rural Alaska since it was overloaded with state employees. Advice on manpower needs, he added, should come from the cities and the villages, not the State.

Commissioner of Labor Tom Moore is chairman of the board. Other members include Fred Chiei, industry representative from Anchorage; Frank Cox, director of the State Planning and Research Division; Ben Guerke, manager of the Bristol Bay Borough; Flore Lekanof, Alaska Federation of Natives; Joseph Marshall, labor representative from Fairbanks; Don Berry, Alaska Municipal League; Dr. Clifford Hartman, commissioner of education, and Ed Hildebrand, Nulato city councilman.