

Gubernatorial candidates interviewed by AFN Board

The following are excerpts from interviews conducted by the AFN Board with the Democratic nominee for governor, Steve Cowper, and the Republican nominee, Arliss Sturgulewski.

WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS ON STATE PARTICIPATION IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT?

- a. Mining/Timber Development
- b. Oil & Gas/ Taxation
- c. Opening of ANWR
- d. Fisheries

COWPER: I think that the State ought to participate in economic development in a number of different ways; when resource development takes place on state land, I think that the private sector ought to be given the information that we have so that we can make the market decisions that are necessary.

I think there are many cases where smaller development projects can be assisted by state government. As far as direct state participation in a specific economic project — I'm against it — I don't believe that the state ought to invest in private economic ventures or to be a participant in any way other than to steer the project in the right direction: promoting products if necessary, but not (by) direct state participation in the project. I don't think it is smart.

I felt that Red Dog was a direct participation by the state on a specific project. I think it is a good project. I hope that it goes; it will benefit everybody. I thought it was wrong for the state to participate in it.

I'm not going to go in and interfere with the project — it is a done deal — contracts (are) signed and people are at work. If there is an extension of time necessary on that project then I will back it.

ANWR - Oil & Gas Taxation: I'm against further oil and gas taxation. I think it will discourage activity at a very difficult time and I think we need to promote more stability here in terms of oil and gas.

(On) ANWR, I'm for it, under the proper environmental constraints. I think that the purpose of the wildlife refuge is to protect the caribou herd

and the industry is going to have to come to terms with that. They understand it and I think that as long as the state keeps a sharp watch out, I think they can do the job.

Fisheries: The goal would be for Alaskans to capture the profit from fisheries from the time you take the fish out of the water until the time that it is served. Specifically, in terms of fisheries — Bering Sea fisheries in rural Alaska — I'd like to encourage the establishment of exclusive economic zones. You have a relatively small fishery and the people in the villages go out and along comes large out-of-state ships and get the take and leave.

I think it comes down to a matter of priorities and frankly the village economy is more of a priority for me.

STURGULEWSKI: I support all of the developmental areas, mining and timber; a lot of equities have to be balanced between those developments so that you don't harm one thing over the other. There will be conflicts say, between timber and fish; mining, and where people live, so you don't have to take in environmental considerations but it is also important that we develop the economy.

I am strongly committed to doing the kinds of marketing and promotion that will open markets not only in the Pacific Rim but utilizing products within Alaska.

On oil and gas taxation: I have not supported a change from the current method. I think we are in a situation now where the industry is reeling along with the state of Alaska and this is certainly not the time to come and change the method of taxation.

ANWR: I do feel that we need to be very sure that ANWR is open to development. There are environmental issues that have to be handled and I think we can meet those both in exploration and development. It is critical to the state that we do move ahead.

Fisheries: I serve as an advisor to the International North Pacific Fisheries Commission and that deals with interception on the high seas. I support value added — that is onshore development whenever possible — have been supportive of sea ports and those things that help make access to the fisheries.

I did support sale 92; I won't tell you differently than that because I feel that that development can go forward with the right kind of stipulations...

WHAT IS YOUR POSITION ON 1991 LEGISLATION? DO YOU ADVOCATE PASSAGE OF THE LEGISLATION THIS YEAR? WILL YOU PUBLICLY SUPPORT THE LEGISLATION FOLLOWING THIS MEETING? WHAT IS THE BEST ROLE OF THE GOVERNOR ON THIS ISSUE TO ENSURE THE PASSAGE AND DO YOU FREELY SUPPORT THIS?

COWPER: I'm in favor of the 1991 legislation. I don't advocate a delay in it and I think there has been a lot of public input in the process.

I don't think that it is up to the governor to come in and say, "This is the best possible way to ensure continued Native ownership." I think it is up to the Native community to do that, and for the governor to say, "O.K. That is a concept that we can support here."

Lot of BIA programs were cut off with statements like, "All Alaska Natives are rich," and "We don't need those programs anymore." Somebody has to educate people in Washington, D.C.

STURGULEWSKI: As you know, I signed a letter during the campaign that said that there should be a delay. I did not say, as I recall, a delay for a year, but a delay for one reason: there were political considerations but also the fact that there were issues that needed on the part of the public resolution.



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...I do mention to you the one area where I have had some concern and I have been consistent and I raised it and it is on the question of taxation, particularly of lands in the organized borough. I understand there is action being taken to attempt to resolve that to put down any fears people have on the sovereignty issue and if those things are resolved, certainly I would like to see that (1991 legislation) go through.

I cannot publicly state that I will publicly support it until I have seen those amendments. I don't operate that way in terms of making a commitment prior to having seen what is accomplished by the legislation.

WHAT ARE YOUR IDEAS FOR PROMOTING THE RURAL ECONOMY?

COWPER: I don't look at rural Alaska as being one mass and everyone is the same. There are some possibilities available in some areas and other possibilities in other areas. It is important for the government to provide a source of expertise for small businesses: marketing information, best accounting systems to use, the kind of stuff that is often done in other states and I just don't feel we've done very well in Alaska.

I see the key to the Alaska economy in terms of our individual skills and the skill of the state government in marketing what we have to sell here. In places where there are limited markets for rural products, I would like to see the state go out and develop those markets because it is their position to do that.

I would like to see the state do what it can to make it less expensive in the village. That has some meaning in the areas of energy use, in terms of housing, in terms of trying to figure out better ways of getting products out to the villages at a lower cost. I'm not being very specific and also I am open for ideas.

I would like to do what I can to see that the expensive communication in the rural areas is brought to an absolute minimum. I think there is something that can be done to reduce the cost of communication both through telephone systems and through the information system that goes through the satellite system.

STURGULEWSKI: It's a tough one and I'm going to leave for you a statement of position on issues facing rural Alaska.

I think we need to look area by area. To me a model has been the NANA region. The regional strategy approach where you work with people. There's involvement by government only in supplying expertise and information but people get together and look at areas where they can concentrate development and look for opportunities. I agree with this. I think that is badly needed in the mid-Yukon, Lower-Kuskokwim. They are talking about doing that and I am willing to support that.

WHAT IS YOUR POSITION ON SUBSISTENCE... WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS TO IMPLEMENT YOUR POSITION?

COWPER: I back the rural priority in terms of subsistence. I recognize that it is extraordinarily important from a cultural standpoint as well as from an economic standpoint. I think that the bill we have today is workable. I backed it; I lobbied for it.

In terms of implementing it, I think it is important to put people on board who recognize the necessity for the subsistence priority to be implemented in terms of policy. People that I would put on that board will have that kind of sensitivity. Just by what I said it kind of excludes certain people. Both the Board of Fish and the Board of Game will have to have people there — my appointments — will be people who understand the need for subsistence and who are not opposed to it.

STURGULEWSKI: Subsistence has to be a major part of the rural economy. I think subsistence — my position is very clear on that — we worked very very hard on that issue last year and the bill came out of my committee and did pass the legislature. Subsistence is going to be an increasing thing when the cash dollars are going to be less.

WHAT IS YOUR POSITION ON NATIVE SOVEREIGNTY?

COWPER: In the first place, my experience at least has been that it means different things to different people; even among the Native community it means different things to different people. I look at it as being an effort by the Native people of Alaska to assert more control over their own lives and I support that. The way in which you do it is, of course, very important.

...I would like to see village problems handled within the village as much as possible. I think that one of the major problems that developed over the last few years; I think that there is a feeling that a lot of what goes on in the villages that is important is controlled out of Juneau or Anchorage or Washington, D.C. or someplace else and I would like to see the villages better equipped to resolve their own problems with assistance both in terms of expertise and in terms of funding from the state. It is real important.

In terms of creating separate jurisdictional units — which is what some people talk about when they talk about sovereignty — units that are outside the jurisdiction of the state, I don't favor it. I don't think it's going to work very well.

STURGULEWSKI: It is in the eye of the beholder and that is part of the communication that is needed between people on the issue. As governor of the state I would uphold the constitution; and we are one state and if sovereignty means separateness then I certainly do not support that. But I think there are many areas of cooperation. I have supported the VPSO program... (which) provides a very special need. I have supported contracting for services. If that is what sovereignty means, flexibility in working within the constitution, then I support that.

I am concerned about the sovereignty movement that pulls away from the structure. I don't think that is the best way to go. If we create hundreds of small little units the voice of the people will be lost and it seems to me we need to find those ways with apportionment coming, we need to increase the voice of the people.

HOW DO YOU PROPOSE TO APPOINT YOUR KEY POSITIONS?

COWPER: In the first place, with respect to commissioners: what I'm looking for more than anything else is administrative ability, proven administrative experience. The best commissioners will come up and say, "Governor, I know this is what you think you want to do but..." and why. Basically, I'm looking for people who will be able to take a sense of direction and move with it.

In terms of persons, I can tell you that in any department that directly or indirectly affects the Native community there will be a consultation with the Native community through various ways on those appointments. There would be a direct consultation on Boards the same way. There are several Boards that have had Native persons on them for a long time; I don't particularly see any change.

STURGULEWSKI: I think that one of the basic things that this government will have will be carried forth both in the commissioners and the board appointments: an open process, one that actively solicits input from interested groups. (T)here is going to be an open door policy. I've met and worked with a lot of you over the years and certainly would do this in terms of commissioner and board appointments. I can see the need for setting policy, having good strong capable people that are commissioners.



WILL YOU HAVE RURAL REPRESENTATION ON YOUR TRANSITION TEAM?

COWPER: Yes.

STURGULEWSKI: Yes. I would look to you for leadership.

HOW WILL YOU PRIORITIZE CAPITOL PROJECTS IN THE STATE?

COWPER: I think health and safety has to come first and I notice that just by the nature of things a lot of those projects are in the rural areas. Commitments have been made by the state to try and upgrade facilities in the rural areas, particularly in areas that don't have the basic things that everybody takes for granted in the urban areas, or have come to take for granted over the last ten years. We have to keep that commitment. Money isn't going to flow as easily as it used to. There will be more fights over who gets what. Those facilities that promote health and safety are just number one. That kind of naturally works to the advantage of some of the projects in the villages that relates to those things.

I'm a little suspicious of multi-billion dollar projects. I go for the smaller projects myself — that make economic sense — make sense of the people's lives.

As far as capital projects are concerned, I think it is better for Alaska to have a fairly stable level of capital spending from one year to the next. The business of large spending amounts varying from year to year has a destabilizing effect on the Alaska economy and has been the direct cause of a lot of Alaska contractors to go broke. I would prefer to have a process people can depend on from one year to the next. If we are fortunate to have more money than we need in any one year then we can talk about what to do with it then.

STURGULEWSKI: In the terms on the capital budget — and the dollars are going to be down — there are basics: sewer and water, schools, those projects that have an economic bottom line, for example port facilities, things that can help bring about positive economic development. We simply are not going to be able to get into projects that aren't well thought out and that don't take in the maintenance and operation costs once they are constructed. I feel strongly on that.

...I support community and Regional Affairs working with this because I have seen a lot of projects come in where the local people didn't gain the skills, were not able to participate and so I think there is a balance there between certainly seeing that people in local communities are employed. Hope all goes well with Red Dog. I think it makes good sense that people from that region receive the training and have an opportunity to work and I know you've worked a lot with the oil companies in order to accomplish that.

HOW WILL YOU PRIORITIZE BUDGET REDUCTIONS OR EXPANSIONS IN THE STATE?

COWPER: In my opinion, the primary purpose of state government is to provide services and not to provide payroll. You have to think about the effect of payroll but that isn't what government is in my opinion. It is there for the purpose of providing services to the citizens of the state.

...To me the thing to do is to keep the people in the field and to do something about the administrative part of government aside from the people who are actually providing services to the public. I know that those departments can work better. It is going to take a lot of work by a lot of people. I am going to be calling in from the private sector to help with that.

STURGULEWSKI: The areas that I see that need priority are: education in the broadest kind of sense: that includes Head Start, K-12, the university system and retraining programs; public safety in the broadest sense: health and basic social services. Those I see as the key areas for government.