

Sturgulewski headquarters are 'bustling'

by Jeffrey R. Richardson
for the Tundra Times

The campaign headquarters for Arliss Sturgulewski and Jim Campbell on Fireweed Lane is bustling.

Nearly 40 staffers and volunteers are checking in, manning phones, huddling with the Republican candidates for governor and lieutenant governor.

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The mood is business-like, a little intense as the campaign goes to the wire. The days have gotten longer. Sturgulewski's confidence seems authentic, but she concedes that her late-filing competitor Wally Hickel has been stronger than expected.

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• Sturgulewski takes nothing for granted

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Her own recent polls have showed Sturgulewski leading Democratic contender Tony Knowles by nearly 10 points; an *Anchorage Daily News* poll published Oct. 12 gave her a 5-point lead.

When asked about rumors of yet another survey that show her leading the pack, with Hickel second and Knowles in third place, Sturgulewski shrugs off speculation.

"It's pretty flaky out there," Sturgulewski said.

Taking nothing for granted, she continues to campaign hard on themes that have highlighted her second run for governor: fairness, personal integrity, a state Senate record spanning four terms and leadership based on bringing people together to work out common problems.

Sturgulewski's fundamental optimism about state problem-solving extends to her views about rural Alaska and Native issues. Her approach to solving the dilemma of subsistence illustrates this point.

Despite the hours devoted to debating what course the state would follow in devising a subsistence policy acceptable to the federal government

at the end of the last session, Sturgulewski asserts there's room for more talk and places a high priority on "starting the process of bringing Alaska together to resolve the issue."

Sturgulewski is confident that a viable consensus can be reached on the issue. She points to the successful efforts of a broad range of interests — loggers, fishermen and environmentalists — to reach agreement on amendments to the Forest Practices Act enacted last session by the Legislature.

As for her own position on subsistence, Sturgulewski said she deplores the loss of state fish and game management on federal lands because of the failure to meet the federal requirements for giving rural residents a fish and game preference in times of scarcity.

But she is adamant that rural subsistence users should have such a priority and pledged to continue working for a solution that contains that essential ingredient.

"I recognize the very real dependence on subsistence for many people in our state, and I am dedicated to defending their subsistence rights," Sturgulewski said. "More than that, I believe the subsistence issue goes

deeper than a debate over whether some residents should be allowed priority access to limited fish and game resources. Ultimately, the central question is this: are the spiritual and cultural traditions of Alaska Natives understood and respected?"

Sturgulewski sees a grim result if consensus on subsistence cannot be reached.

"If we don't talk, if we don't continue the dialogue, we will in fact become polarized. There will be more anger, more issues before the court and less control by Alaskans in the final analysis. It takes some innovative thought."

Her own education in rural issues includes her 12 years in the state Senate. Though an urban legislator representing an Anchorage district, she describes herself as a "continual visitor" to the Bush.

She has chaired the Community and Regional Affairs Committee and sponsored legislation to promote economic development in rural areas under the management of local people.

Several years ago, with committee tow, Sturgulewski toured the municipal government statutes. Some of the impressions formed at that time have left their mark on the rural policy

she proposes to follow if elected.

The first point of that policy, Sturgulewski says is "to see that local people can be more in control of their lives."

She also believes in maintenance of basic state services in rural areas, such as sewer, water and public safety.

She also feels the state has a role to play in retaining important federal services in the Bush.

"(We need) to see that the federal government lives up to its special responsibilities to Native people," Sturgulewski said.

On Native sovereignty, Sturgulewski said the complexity of the issue, made worse by a number of pending lawsuits in federal courts, defies a simple solution. She expressed ambivalence about Gov. Steve Cowper's recent administrative order which attempted to clarify aspects of the problem upon which the state and sovereignty advocates could agree.

"I'm committed, as one of the first orders of business, to a review of that administrative order. We can do a lot more on this issue of communities being in charge of their own affairs, but it needs to have a compatibility with

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• Sturgulewski

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state government and the state constitution."

On another local control issue, reapportionment of legislative districts, Sturgulewski acknowledged the concern of many in the Bush that there would soon be fewer rural legislators after boundaries are redrawn.

Although withholding judgement on the best solution to reapportionment until census data is fully analyzed — sometime next spring — Sturgulewski said, "It's critical that there's good input from the people that are affected."

She indicated, too, she's open to a wide variety of ideas on the issue, including expanding the size of the Legislature to allow for more representation.

"I'm more than willing to explore those options."

Sturgulewski said some of her optimism about the future of rural Alaska stems from her perception that the sobriety movement is making headway against drug and alcohol abuse, producing a cadre of role models for Native young people.

She said if elected, her administration's fight against alcohol and drugs would include working with communities to assist them in "developing local economies so there can be more meaningful and productive work for the people of rural Alaska."

Sturgulewski's doggedness has marked her career in the Senate and on the campaign trail.

Her supporters in Juneau like to point out that the phone number for the Southeast headquarters is the same as it was when she lost to outgoing Steve Cowper four years ago — she never stopped running.