

# Village leaders meet with state officials

Gov. Steve Cowper told participants of the Rural Alaska Community Action Program Inc.'s 14th Annual Village Participation Conference that rural governments must be given more

control of local affairs.

"People in villages should not have to depend on people in Juneau and Washington, D.C., to solve their problems," Cowper said, explaining he plans to appoint a council of Alaska Natives to address major problems in village governments. He also said that Natives should maintain ownership of Native land beyond 1991, and "forever, if possible."

The conference, held last month, was sponsored by RurALCAP to afford rural leaders and potential leaders the opportunity to prioritize and publicize major rural issues and concerns.

This year's conference theme was "Working Together in Unity for Survival." It was selected in light of reduced state revenues.

During the three-day conference participants adopted five major priorities:

- Maintaining health and education funding.

- Supporting local economic development.

- Curbing drug and alcohol abuse.

- Protecting Native lands.

During the conference, participants heard from state leaders in addition to Cowper, including Rep. Kay Wallis of Fort Yukon and Sens. Willie Hensley of Kotzebue and Fred Zharoff of Kodiak.

Chester Ballot, chairman of the conference, said an important element of the meeting is that it "provides an open forum for villagers to list their concerns and identify and record issues unique to rural Alaska."

Ballot was re-elected to serve as chairman at the 1988 conference. Elected to serve as planners were Walter Charley of Copper Center; Pat Norman of Port Graham; Mary Beth Solomon of Fort Yukon; Susan James of Birch Creek; Jackson Lomack of Akiachak; Virginia Ward of Port Lions; John Christensen of Chenega Bay and Ken Blatchford of Seward

(alternate).

Resolutions passed by conference participants included:

- Maintaining health/education funding at the 1985 funding level.

- Requesting legislators to encourage and support locally oriented economic development projects.

- Supporting mariculture legislation.

- Urging the Legislature to maintain and continue the Longevity Bonus.

- Requesting that the Legislature continue funding to local fish and game advisory committees.

- Requesting that the Bureau of Land Management expedite land surveys.

- Urging the state and federal governments to take action to ensure rights of tribal sovereignty.

- Urging continued funding of the Rural Alaska Television Network.

Participants also recommended that federal and state hearings should be held in villages affected by proposed development of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.