



**BUSH CAMPAIGNING**—With Aug. 28 primary elections drawing near, campaign tempos are increasing as political candidates get out to meet the voters. Kotzebue House candidate William Hensley, in Kiana on the Kobuk Ri-

ver, doesn't miss the younger generations when passing out his campaign literature, even though it will be some time before they vote.

—TIM BRADNER Photo

# 1966 - Can it Be Political Year to Be Remembered ?

By TIM BRADNER

Almost for certain, 1966 will see some of the most hectic, and interesting, campaigning battles ever waged in Alaska's election arenas.

They may also be the most

unique. Possibly, they will be of the most far-reaching significance.

More candidates are scrambling for less political offices, under Gov. William Egan's reapportionment, than

ever before, and the importance attached to the "bush vote," before considered only in marginal terms, is significant as candidates this year work hard at building support in rural areas.

The key to the "bush vote," some feel, is as simple as going there.

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But that's the hard part.

With Alaska covering 586,400 square miles, roughly half the population resides in urban areas such as Fairbanks, Anchorage and Juneau.

The other half, however, is scattered in tiny communities along thousands of miles of rivers and coastline throughout the state.

Some communities are towns, with population numbering in hundreds. Some are as small as 30 people. The only way to reach them is by airplane, and in some places even older means of transportation—skin boats and dog teams—must be used.

Before this year, the marginal bush vote was largely forgotten. It was too expensive to campaign in rural areas.

Candidates campaigned vigorously in the larger cities and towns, and hoped to get by with the best they could from the villages in more remote areas.

But this year, an aggressive young Anchorage real estate man running for Congress, a member of the House of Representatives in Juneau, is writing political history in wilderness campaigning.

His name is Mike Gravel, 36 years old and last year Speaker of the State House in Juneau.

Gravel is a "pusher." Some say he pushes too hard, that he's too aggressive and wants too much too soon. He has been in the House of Representatives for three years and last year got himself selected as Speaker of that legislative body.

While in Juneau last year, Gravel pushed through a multi-million dollar regional high school bond package that, if passed by state voters this fall, will build high schools for Native and white youngsters in rural areas where education now is a question of an expensive boarding school or a hoped-for opening in already overcrowded BIA high school facilities in Sitka.

Many accused Gravel of pushing through the regional high school package simply to attract bush support for his present campaign against Rep. Ralph Rivers for Congress.

Others hailed the bill's passage, whatever the motives behind it.

And whatever Gravel had in mind when he conceived the measure, there is now little doubt that the package has brought him solid support in many outlying areas of the state.

The young speaker doesn't figure to let the merits of his Juneau legislation carry him through rural polls alone, though. He's going out to meet the people, and he's doing it in a way that Alaska has never seen before.

There has never been a candidate for statewide office, possibly, that has campaigned in virtually every town, city, village, fishing hamlet and work site in Alaska as hard as Gravel is doing now.

From southeastern Alaska to remote areas of the Aleutian Chain, to densely-populated areas in the Bethel and lower Kuskokwim districts, to canneries on the Yukon River and to scatter-

ed, tiny communities in the Seward peninsula and the Arctic, Gravel is flying and talking—talking problems, listening to needs.

In some communities, villagers had never seen a political candidate before.

Many say the trips are highly effective, that meeting rural voters face-to-face will earn Gravel the block support of the bush. Others disagree, saying that warm receptions accorded the House Speaker in villages are accorded any visitor, and that bush votes will stick to old, familiar names as they have in years past.

New names and new faces are not trusted in rural regions, dissenters say, and the rural vote will, in the end, support parties and people it has for years.

Gravel's name is new to voters, and the stigma of the young man pushing too hard, too fast may, in the end, hurt him, as it did with young and aggressive Lowell Thomas Jr., GOP opponent of Rivers in 1964.

Support for the candidate is not forthcoming from the state's established Democratic office-holders. Instead, the bulk of Gravel's active workers are young people new to politics and pushing perhaps for a newer, more forward political process in the state.

In bush areas, many prominent, respected local legislators are pushing hard for Gravel in their home districts.

Rep. Ray Christiansen of Bethel, a bush pilot of Native blood himself, flew Gravel to lower Kuskokwim villages and introduced him personally to the people.

In the west, Sen. R.R. (Bob) Blodgett of Teller, the independent, blunt-tongued legislator from the Seward Peninsula who is known in every village in western Alaska affectionately as "The Senator" and in Juneau by sometimes not-so-affectionate terms, is pushing hard for Gravel.

Reapportionment eliminated 3 Senate seats in western Alaska and Blodgett himself is faced with running against his former colleague, powerful Sen. Eben Hopson of Barrow, for re-election.

But Blodgett is pushing so hard for Gravel that he says,

"I don't really care what happens to me, I just want Mike to get in."

In the villages Blodgett used his usual hard, simple language in introducing Gravel to the villagers.

"Now what do we do with an old dog that's been in the harness for years, and who's getting so he just runs along with the team and doesn't pull any. We take him out,

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don't we? We put a young pup in there and give some new blood a chance."

Whether Gravel, the new blood, will make it is questionable.

A Rivers-supporter used Blodgett's dogteam analogy the other way.

"Sure, you can put a young pup in, but you don't necessarily put a full-blooded wolf in the middle of your dogteam either!"

The threat of new blood, perhaps wolf-blood, is making established political leaders in the state increasingly edgy.

A month ago Gravel wasn't given a chance against Ri-

vers. Now, after the quiet village campaigning, he is accorded more than a 50-50 chance.

And his city campaign, the loud kind that makes noise, is just getting underway.

Other statewide candidates are taking the Native vote seriously and are flying to the villages, meeting and talking with people.

Republican candidate for Governor Wally Hickel, an Anchorage businessman, recently hit the villages and spent two days talking and visiting people on St. Lawrence Island and the Seward Peninsula.

Hickel hit established lead-

ers with the failure of a reindeer industry on the Seward peninsula, and a promise to work hard toward re-establishing that industry if elected Governor. Hickel spoke before the GOP convention in Nome recently and said that the Seward Peninsula could easily support 200,000 reindeer and an active industry that would provide jobs and payrolls in the now depressed area.

He based his observations on studies conducted by research firms in other states.

Wendell Kay, opposing Gov. William Egan in the August Democratic primary, is also making a real try for the bush vote. Kay covered far western Alaska by air recently, visiting villages.

Republicans Larry Brayton and Jack Schleppegrell, campaigning statewide, recently visited lower Kuskokwim areas.

Brayton is running for U.S. Senate, and hopes to gather enough support to win the GOP nomination, to oppose Sen. E.L. (Bob) Bartlett for the seat in November's general elections.

Schleppegrell is running as a GOP candidate for Secretary of State, a seat now held by Democrat Hugh Wade.