

Ruffled Republican Senators Reject Laura Bergt

Laura Bergt, (Mrs. Neil Bergt), a well known leader in civic, charitable and Alaskan native affairs, was nominated earlier this week to replace U.S. Representative Don Young in the

Alaskan Senate.

Her nomination was rejected by a caucus of senate Republicans in a 6-3 vote of that body on the grounds that her name did not appear on a list of

candidates submitted to the governor by the Fairbanks District Republican Committee.

Mrs. Bergt, who was born in Candle, Alaska, and raised in Nome and Kotzebue, achieved

national recognition, in 1970, when she was appointed by President Nixon to the National Council on Indian Opportunity, to serve a two year term.

This prestigious council con-

sists of 8 citizens and 8 cabinet members, with Vice-President Agnew presiding as chairman.

Presently she is serving on the National Indian Arts and Crafts

(Continued on page 7)



LAURA BERGT — See story above.

Ruffled Republican Senators Reject Laura Bergt's Bid ...

(Continued from page 1)

Council, the Governor's Rural Affairs Commission and is a member of a four man task force for the state's hard of hearing.

Initially, Mrs. Bergt, expressed shock as well as pleasure, at

the governor's appointment, for she hadn't in any way sought it. Her only active involvement in office-seeking had been four years ago, when she filed for a State House seat and sub-

sequently withdrew in favor of her husband, Neil.

On Thursday, the day following her appointment, she was refused confirmation by a caucus of Senate Republicans.

The Republican split was between those who believed that the Governor had disregarded party procedure and was using the appointment purely for political purposes, and those that

felt Mrs. Bergt's capabilities outweighed any violation of party rules.

Sen. John Butrovich, (R-Fairbanks) the senate's most senior member complained that a list of five names recommended by the local district committee had been ignored.

"The name of the game is party politics, and if you're going to have a party, you're going to have to follow the party rules, or you're not going to have a party."

On the other hand, Sen. John Sackett, (R-Galena), was so angered that he refused to vote on confirmation and walked out of the caucus.

He said that arguments against her had run from her sex to "the fact that she had worn an Fud Nott button in the last campaign."

He felt this was unjust criticism, as many times she had supported republican philosophies and candidates, and "fought for what she believed was right despite the will of her people."

On Friday, Governor Egan resubmitted Laura Bergt's name saying that he felt "frustration, even anger" on learning of her rejection. He claimed that he still felt that Mrs. Bergt was the best person for the job.

At this point, Mrs. Bergt tried to get her name approved by the Fairbanks Committee. The committee had not considered her originally, because in order to be chosen, aspirants had to let the committee know they were interested in holding the office.

She called Mrs. Barbara Cole, acting chairwoman of the committee and the wife of one of the nominee's recommended by the committee. Mrs. Bergt asked that a meeting be held to allow her to speak on her own behalf.

The request was turned down and Mrs. Bergt claimed that although she "tried like everything to get her name discussed through party channels, I was just refused."

Mrs. Cole had previously conducted a telephone poll of the committee which resulted in a 9-2 vote against approving the appointment. She said that "basically, we felt that the Governor was trying to by-pass party protocol."

Mrs. Cole emphasised that there was "absolutely no objection to Mrs. Bergt, personally" and denied that any rumors of participation in the Nott campaign had influenced the district's decision.

While Mrs. Bergt was trying to gain a hearing in his home district, the President of the Senate, Terry Miller, (R-Fairbanks), came out with a statement clarifying his position.

"Although I personally voted to confirm Mrs. Bergt, who is a fine lady and an outstanding civic leader, the manner in which the appointment was handled created an unfortunate situation which brought about an understandable hostile reaction from the Republican caucus, particularly in light of the statement of opposition from the Fairbanks party organization."

Senators Terry Miller, Cliff Groh (R-Anchorage), and Jess Harris (R-Fairbanks) were the three votes within the caucus that favored Mrs. Bergt.

When the Republican caucus reconvened on Monday, they held to the position that since the local committee had refused to meet and reconsider the appointment, that the caucus was powerless to do anything other than reject Gov. Egan's second effort to name Mrs. Bergt.

The Governor replied with a
(Continued on page 9)

Laura Bergt...

(Continued from Page 7)

letter to Sen. Terry Miller stating, "It is shocking that such a thing could happen to Mrs. Bergt, an outstandingly capable Alaskan, who has selflessly rendered beneficial service to the fortunes of the Republican party for many years."

The appointee, herself, had mixed reactions. She was pleased with the immense support from her own district and across the state that had come in a flood of telegrams, but disappointed that the Republican caucus had not given her "the courtesy of appearance" to defend her candidacy.

Summing up her feelings, she added, "It was a nice short political career."