

# **\$750,000 doled to rural districts**

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Rural election districts should receive as much money for capital projects as urban districts if an allocation guideline used by the House Finance Committee is adopted when two budget bills are hammered into a compromise by senators and representatives next week.

House Finance chairman, Rep. Russ Meekins, Jr. (D-Anchorage) told legislators to pick out \$750,000 worth of projects for their district, so that the capital budget could be distributed evenly.

Late last week the committee passed out a \$920 million operating budget, about \$60 million less than that proposed by Gov. Jay Hammond, and \$10 million below its Senate counterpart. The differing measures must be melded by a free conference committee.

The House version does not cut out any programs, although requests for long distance phone call allowances, travel and new equipment have been greatly reduced, according to Meekins. The Senate budget bill eliminates some entire programs, including the Alaska Public Offices Commission and the fisheries enhancement program with the Department of Fish and Game. Neither figure includes up to \$15 million in budget amendments that will have

to be added to a final total.

Considering it's an austerity year, our rural areas could do fairly well," said Rep. Phil Guy (D-Kwethluk). "But that's still not very good as there's much more that needs to be done in the bush.

I'm not confident we'll get all the projects we've listed, because in previous years a lot of what I've gotten through has been reduced or deleted," said Guy, who has served five years on the House Finance committee.

"A number of projects that will be approved this year depend on what happens in the free conference and on the governor," he added. Last year, there were no bonds authorized for northwestern Alaska.

While bush representatives chose smaller, specific projects for state funding,

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senators from rural areas appear to be focusing on larger statewide plans, such as expanding telecommunications.

When asked what spending priorities he had in mind for 1980, Sen. George Hohman (D-Bethel) responded: "To answer that question is to flag my projects and seriously impair my negotiating

power."

Meekins said the individual lists of \$750,000 requests should be kept intact during free conference bargaining with the Senate.

A list of those requests made by members of the House bush caucus appears above. A similar outline has not been put together by the three bush lawmakers in the Senate.