

Reasonable request

Gov. Bill Sheffield has taken a diplomatic course when he wrote recently to Interior Secretary William Clark seeking the secretary's help in resolving state concerns about offshore oil leasing.

Clark has issued some statements which indicate he might be willing to slow down some of the lease sales in some areas without specifying those areas affected.

Sheffield has asked significant delays in drilling in the Barrow Arch and in the fisheries-rich Bristol Bay region, both of which have dubious amounts of oil resources.

The governor is trying a diplomatic approach because his hands have been tied legally by the U.S. Supreme Court which ruled that the federal government doesn't have to comply with state regulations covering offshore oil leasing.

The reasons that Sheffield has given for seeking delays in the leasing schedule and modifications of other federal OCS procedures are all very valid.

Under the leasing schedule which was accelerated by former Interior Secretary James Watt, no one, not even the oil companies or the federal government are adequately able to research or prepare for all the factors which come into play in the issue of oil development on such a magnitude.

Watt had defended the leasing acceleration by saying that he was obligated to encourage oil exploration to assure that the people of America had sufficient oil in the coming decades. But, study has shown that no great increase in leasing and exploration activities has occurred with the accelerated schedule. Hence, no great amount of money has flowed into federal coffers from said lease sales so they could almost be considered counterproductive.

It is not in the best interest of the country to hold an ill-thought-out and ill-researched leasing and exploration program in an area which is so important to the basic food supply of the region, the state, the nation and the world.

We applaud the Sheffield approach and hope that the new Secretary of the Interior looks at the whole picture when he considers the request of the governor and the people of Alaska.