

Sturgulewski: Rural priority not the answer

by Geoff Kennedy
for the Tundra Times

Editor's note: This is the second in a series of articles the Tundra Times will be running on candidates for governor and lieutenant governor.

Sen. Arliss Sturgulewski, R-Anchorage, doesn't say where she stands on subsistence. But she does say where she doesn't.

"A rural-preference amendment wouldn't solve a lot of the problems that exist," she said. She cited the Kenaitze case as an example. The Kenaitze Indian Tribe contends the whole Kenai Peninsula is a rural area, even though the state considers it urban and not qualified for a rural sub-

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sistence preference.

Sturgulewski also rules out amending the State Constitution to provide a subsistence priority for Alaska Natives. She says such a proposal will never pass the Legislature, much less win the approval of voters.

Gov. Steve Cowper and Rep. George Jacko, D-Pedro Bay, have proposed a rural-preference constitutional amendment to replace the state subsistence law ruled unconstitutional last December by the state Supreme Court.

Sturgulewski criticized Cowper for making a proposal.

Instead, she said, "The governor should call a roundtable of the affected parties. This issue is very broad and takes in the spectrum (of different opinions). . . Coming out with an approach stifles dialogue."

Sturgulewski does not have the answer to the problem of how to allocate Alaska's fish and game in times of scarcity.

But she believes the answer "will evolve through the legislative process."

She listed three "bottom-line" subsistence issues:

- To protect the health of the resource.
- To avoid a federal takeover of fish and game on federal lands.
- To avoid a "long and divisive" battle over subsistence.

She expects lawmakers to solve the problem through legislation this year.

Until then, "I keep an open mind until I get all the facts and solutions. We will look at all the options presented. I want to see a solution that works."

Asked to set priorities for balancing the state budget when revenues diminish, Sturgulewski said spending earnings from the Permanent Fund would be the last resort.

She said the best alternative would consist of a variety of measures:

- Opening state lands and building roads to them to encourage development.
- Cutting subsidies to agencies, such as the Alaska Housing Finance Corp., while imposing or raising user fees on items such as drivers' licenses.
- Streamlining state agencies and avoiding duplication of services by different agencies.

•Setting up a "rainy-day account" of monies the state collects from lawsuits and out-of-court settlements.

If the state budget still weren't balanced after such measures, she would simultaneously introduce a state income tax, cut aid to local governments and cut the state work force.

Sturgulewski said she would retain Power Cost Equalization, the Longevity Bonus and the Rural Alaska Television Network.

She called PCE "a good program, and I support its continuation. I support the concept of an affordable supply of energy."

She said she would try to design the program to encourage energy conservation but would not cut the level of service to rural Alaskans.

On RATNET, she said, "People, wherever they live, deserve access to events in Alaska. RATNET is that answer."

But she expressed reservations about alcohol commercials on the network. She said she would support the sale of the network, provided that the service



Arliss Sturgulewski

would continue at the same level. She considers RATNET as important as public television and public libraries in urban areas.

Sturgulewski holds a similar position on the Longevity Bonus. She supports the \$250-a-month payments to Alaskans who now get them. But she would phase out the payments to future recipients.

Sturgulewski doesn't plan to add any new services to rural Alaska, but said her priorities are health, safety, water, sewer, education and job training.

She said the state can do more to improve the economy of rural Alaska.

The Anchorage state senator said legislation she sponsored helped set up rural development associations. The state should improve its outreach to rural Alaska by adopting the "circuit-rider" approach and go from village to village providing expertise and information about state service to small businesses and help them get loans,

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Sturgulewski supports a proposed Joint Commission on Alaska Natives, which would be composed of representatives appointed by President Bush and Gov. Steve Cowper and would look into problems facing the Alaska Native community.

And she wants rural Alaskans represented on a board that will reapportion the state after the 1990 census.

Sturgulewski believes the key to governing the state effectively is "to attract a positive group of Alaskans to serve at the highest level. I attract good people. . . People make a difference."

Sturgulewski, 62, has lived in Anchorage since 1952. She has a bachelor's degree in economics and business from the University of Washington. A self-employed widow, Sturgulewski has served in the State Senate since 1978.