

Bob Richards, Republican candidate for governor

This is another in a series of interviews with candidates for public office in Alaska this year. The Tundra Times is pleased to offer these interviews as a public service to our readers.

Republican Bob Richards is a successful businessman and banker with no prior experience in public office. This in itself is no hindrance to Richards, who calls himself one of a "new breed" of candidates appearing nationwide who emphasize practical experience (in fields other than politics) and a commitment to public service. Our interview was conducted by Tundra Times Editor Jim Benedetto in the offices of the Tundra Times.

TUNDRA TIMES: Do you support the right of rural residents of Alaska to a subsistence preference?

RICHARDS: Well, yes; but that doesn't mean to imply that I didn't support the rights of non-rural residents. It's a very complex issue. Everybody, or most people, seemed to be pleased with the way it was all working prior to the *Madison* case. And I was for endeavoring to come up with a solution that sort of got us back to the way things were before the *Madison* case.

TUNDRA TIMES: Do you think the new law will restore us to that standard?

RICHARDS: I don't know; it remains to be seen. It appears as if it may

in such a fashion. I recognize that there are certain social issues and there are certain domestic crimes — social issues, there is alcoholism; domestic crimes, there is domestic violence, for example — that are not being adequately taken care of by the conventional courts or social service agencies, that could be more appropriately addressed by Native organizations, and I would be very, very supportive of that. I have an immense respect for the family, the community, and the closer to home, if you will, that we can address all kinds of issues, and the closer to our traditional ways of doing things that we can address issues, the better. So, I would be very supportive of that. But I would stop short of, and I don't think there is a need to, create a new layer of, or type of, government. I think we can achieve it through institutions and organizations created through our system of government.

TUNDRA TIMES: Would you, as governor, actively oppose the efforts of tribal government groups to assert their authority over traditional lands and/or waters?

RICHARDS: Well, we're talking about concepts here that mean different things to different people, but it is the responsibility of the state of Alaska to manage the natural resources, and I would not be for giving that up. I think

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"(M)y administration will be supportive of a healthy economic development for Alaska in general..."

be a step in that direction. I think the law is a step in the right direction. Whether or not it gets us there will really depend somewhat on the implementation.

TUNDRA TIMES: Will your appointments, as governor, to such bodies as the Fish and Game Boards and the National Park Service Subsistence Resource Commission reflect your concerns over upholding state law in this regard?

RICHARDS: Yes it (they) would.

TUNDRA TIMES: Will you take action to defend the subsistence rights of Alaska Natives to hunt whales and other marine mammals when international organizations threaten to impose bans on such activities, and the commitment of the federal government wanes?

RICHARDS: Yes. I think that we have to recognize the cultural aspect of subsistence. And when one recognizes that and when one recognizes that the governor of Alaska is the governor of Alaskans, and, indeed, it is the responsibility of the governor of Alaska to support the interests of Alaskans, and all Alaskans.

TUNDRA TIMES: The issue of tribal sovereignty is so hot right now that we've actually got several candidates for office who are making it their main campaign issue. Where do you stand? Do you believe that the state's constitution should be amended to allow the recognition by the state of Alaska of tribal governments for the purposes of Indian Child Welfare or other jurisdictional disputes?

RICHARDS: No, I don't believe the state constitution should be amended

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that's a state responsibility. But I would be a governor that invites the input and the active participation of all interested and affected parties. One of the reasons I'm running for governor is that there hasn't been enough input into state policy... we haven't had a governor with a genuine ear to the people, and that's one of the reasons I'm running for governor. So, I want to indicate quite clearly a sensitivity to local interests and concerns, and I'm recognizing that they're legitimate, but I don't think they justify the establishment of a new layer or a new body of government.

TUNDRA TIMES: Have you read the Governor's Task Force Report on State, Federal and Tribal Relations?

RICHARDS: No, I haven't; perhaps you could provide me with one.

TUNDRA TIMES: One of the issues raised in the report is the disparity between the amount of state revenue sharing monies available to an incorporated community as opposed to an identical community that is unincorporated. In the village of Akiachak, where residents finally succeeded in dissolving their municipal government, people argue that unincorporated communities have the same needs as incorporated ones, while others point out that the state has provided a means for meeting those needs, i.e., incorporation. Does this disparity disturb you?

RICHARDS: This disparity disturbs me greatly. These things are a matter of statute, and you can change the statute (by) which these funds are allocated.

TUNDRA TIMES: One of the major themes of your campaign is to broaden the economic development of the state in order to stimulate its economy and create more jobs. Do you believe that this necessitates a tradeoff with environmental concerns, or do you think it's possible to stimulate resource development while preserving the quality of our air, soil and water?

RICHARDS: Clearly, in this day and age, it is clearly possible to develop our natural resources; it's clearly possible to reach an optimum level of development where you achieve a balance between economic growth and preservation of the environment. Indeed, to me, the only objective of economic growth

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is to result in improvement in the quality of life. If it doesn't, then why have the growth? I do not now, nor ever have, support economic growth for economic growth's sake. What we want is a society in which each individual has the opportunity to pursue his or her own self-fulfillment. Now, that is most readily done in a prosperous society, and an environmentally healthy society. We can achieve that balance.

I view myself as one of the new breed of governors that is emerging throughout the Lower 48 — some are Republicans, some are Democrats, some are liberals, some are conservatives — but they have an uncanny understanding of their states; they are enlightened managers. They are managers with a social consciousness, and they are embarking on programs that are pursuing both economic development and improvements in the quality of life. And that's exactly what my policy is.

TUNDRA TIMES: Are you satisfied with our record on that so far? In places like Alaska's North Slope, it seems that little of the billions of dollars being pumped out of that land is trickling down to improve the lives of residents in any dramatic way.

RICHARDS: That school in Barrow was financed by oil money; the utilidor was financed by oil money; the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation is pursuing economic development, and their buildings, and the jobs they're in results in economic development. I don't see where I agree with your conclusion. The new courthouse was financed with oil money. Most of the people who are staying at the Top of the World Hotel and the other overnight accommodations are traveling there related to economic development. These create jobs for waitresses, and housekeepers — I don't see where you draw your conclusion.

Now, you've got attitudinal impediments to deal with — maybe some peo-



Bob Richards, Republican candidate for governor.



Richards with family members (from left) Bob, Jody, Michael, Marilyn, Paul and Sally.

ple are not working because of some attitudinal impediments, because of some cultural impediments, because of some educational shortcomings — but I think that if you take a good look around Barrow, it's not very difficult at all to see an awful lot of things that have been financed by oil money...

(It's interesting to observe that the most aggressive and enthusiastic groups favoring the Red Dog project has been the NANA corporation and the Native leadership. Either they're making a rational decision, and that's going to accrue to the general benefit of the people in that area, or they're making an irrational decision and it's not going to.

TUNDRA TIMES: The Department of Environmental Conservation has a tremendously difficult job in Alaska. They have to cover a lot of ground with very few people, and very little money. Since much of our economy is based on mineral exploration, the role of DEC is increasingly more important. Considering the importance of their work, would you, as governor, increase the budget for the DEC?

RICHARDS: Yes. Yes; section 402 of the Clean Water Act gives the states the right to manage their own water resource. For some reason that's unknown

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to me, the state of Alaska has opted not to do this. Thirty-seven other states have, but the state of Alaska has opted not to. As governor, I, like 37 other states, would implement section 402 of the Clean Water Act, take over management of our own water resources, which would imply the staffing requirements to achieve that.

TUNDRA TIMES: How do you feel about oil exploration and development on the Outer Continental Shelf? To what extent would you allow such development to take place, and how fast, considering the annual value of the salmon harvest in, for example, the Bristol Bay?

RICHARDS: The question is, is there a relationship between oil exploration and development, and the salmon harvest. Your question implies some conclusions that may or may not have a degree of validity. And I think we'd better resolve this question; we've been studying it for two decades. And I think it's about time we come to a conclusion. But there's some interesting things to observe.

If you were to close down the oil industry in the Gulf of Mexico, for example, and a government edict came forth, and said, "O.K. The oil industry is closing down in the Gulf of Mexico, and we're ordering you to dismantle the rigs and close it all down, shut it down! Dismantle the rigs!" Well, you know the sector from whom you would hear the biggest hue and cry, the sector who would say, "You're bringing us to our knees, you are killing us; we have no longer a livelihood!" Of course, it would be the fishing industry in the Gulf of Mexico. Those rigs have served as a basis for the emergence of a vibrant shellfish and bottomfish industry. I'll give you another example: Cook Inlet. A very tight, confined body of water, has had oil and gas exploration, development and production for two decades. And today, the biggest problem the fishing industry is facing today in Cook Inlet is the return of too many reds!

Furthermore, there've been some interesting studies in Cook Inlet that have suggested that to the extent that there have been miniscule seepages of hydrocarbons into the water, it has actually aided the development of foodstuffs for the fish. Jim, what I'm getting to, and I think this is one of the most profound characteristics of my candidacy, and underlies why I'm running, is we have to stop managing by myth. We have to stop managing by myth. There are too many sectors in Alaska, Jim, that don't want to be confused by the facts.

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But it's time for some real leadership in this state; and it's time for somebody at the helm who can, in the true, genuine sense bring to an end the divisiveness.

This state is at war, Jim, the likes I have never seen, and for a decade and a half it has been my job to travel around the state. And I have never seen such a level of anxiety or friction, as I do today. And a large part of it results from myth, and from certain groups not wanting to be confused by the facts. Now, I'm not here asserting that oil and fish *can* coexist, but there is no proof whatsoever that they cannot. The thing is, we've got to gather the data, analyze it, make a conclusion, develop a policy and move forward.

...Jim, this is why I'm running for governor; this state needs a healing like it's never needed before. This state needs a governor with a global view, with an overall view of this state, and a sensitivity and an ear to all the sectors of this state, and an understanding of the concepts that we've just discussed. The present administration doesn't even understand the concept... all they understand is who's for me and who's agin' me. Leadership is an immense responsibility! We're not just saying, "Oh, goody! Who's going to get to hold the figurehead chair of governor?" — and that's the way some of my opponents are — it's who has the perspective and sensitivities to start exerting some leadership in the real sense of that term.

TUNDRA TIMES: What's your definition of leadership?

RICHARDS: An understanding of these concepts, number one; number two, an ability to enunciate them; number three, an ear to all parties involved; number four, an ability to synthesize all of the input; number five, an ability to draw a conclusion; number six, an ability to enunciate that conclusion to all Alaskans; number seven, the ability to cause people to understand it and *bring them forward!* In the same way that FDR did with the nation, that Eisenhower did with the nation, that John Kennedy did with the nation, and that Ronald Reagan did with the nation; and I just named two Democrats, two liberals, and two Republicans, two conservatives — but all four of them possessed those same

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qualities — and, my goodness, that's what we've got to get to, or this state is going to enter a divisive period that will wreak havoc with all of us.

TUNDRA TIMES: Placer miners in Alaska claim that regulations are simply designed to put them out of business, while environmentalists and those living downstream from some mines complain about muddied and contaminated water. What is your position on placer mining?

RICHARDS: The water quality standards below (downstream of) the mine should match the water quality standards above the mine.

But placer mining, it's one of those industries that's woven into the very fabric of what makes Alaska what it is. It's part of our history. The firms are typically small, family, independent companies, and it plays not only a important economic role, but it plays a very important social and cultural role within a particular sphere of part of Alaska.

TUNDRA TIMES: What is your vision of a typical Native village around the turn of the century? Do you see Bush communities with any further modernization, i.e., more roads, schools, hospitals?

RICHARDS: My vision of a typical Native village in the year 2000 is number one, that the people in that village are celebrating their *Native-ness*, and know that their heritage and culture is the source of appreciation and pride on the part of non-Natives. That's characteristic number one. Characteristic number two: that they are able to have the other facilities and services that they, and only they, desire.

TUNDRA TIMES: To what extent would a Richards administration support the development of local economies and industries in Bush areas?

RICHARDS: I would support it to the extent that those local areas wanted it. If those local areas have a very aggressive posture toward it, I would support it aggressively; if those local areas are opposed to it, that would be my posture relative to those local areas. I think the local areas have a legitimate,

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dominant posture when it comes to determining what occurs.

Kaktovik, by the way, is very excited — if there is one group on the face of the earth that is opposed to the Udall bill (which would classify the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as wilderness), it's most of the people of Kaktovik.

TUNDRA TIMES: What steps would a Richards Administration take to alleviate unemployment in the Bush?

RICHARDS: Well, again, I would do those things that were desired by the villages. For those villages that aren't concerned about unemployment, I would be less concerned about it; for those villages who are very concerned about it, I would be very concerned about it.

But my administration will be supportive of, basically, a healthy economic development for Alaska in general, and pursued in such a way that those local areas that want to benefit from it, and those individuals in Alaska who want to benefit from it, do so. There is no doubt that if we're going to continue to receive the benefits of the social services throughout Alaska that we've become used to, if we're going to have a reasonable amount of job opportunities for those Alaskans who want them, we are going to need a more systematic, well thought out, assertive program for economic development.

The state, right now, has no economic development program. The state is floundering and wallowing around in terms of economic development. It has no economic development goal. It has no employment opportunity goal. It has no plan for developing the public revenues to continue to finance the social services need. We need to forecast the social services need, and from that, develop revenue projections and from that develop an economic development

strategy. And as governor, I would do all of those things that must be done...

The first thing the state of Alaska must do, if it wants to have any hope of economic development — if it doesn't do this, all the talk about economic development is just that: talk — and that is, abandon, once and for all, the adversarial relationship that exists between government and business in this state, like it does in no other state in the nation. Alaska is the most anti-business state in the nation. When NANA and Cominco decided they wanted to develop the Red Dog mine, they experienced only *obstructionism* from the state of Alaska. When the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation and Kaktovik got interested in the possibility of some oil exploration and development activity on the North Slope, they receive only uncooperativeness from the state of Alaska. When Doyon gets interested in mining, it doesn't find a friendly, constructive posture from state government. When Sealaska wants to develop a rational forest products activity, it finds a state government that's flip-flopping back and forth between the U.S. Forest Service and our Department of Fish and Game.

TUNDRA TIMES: Now wait a minute; we're not familiar with all of the instances you cite, but wasn't it the Sheffield Administration that provided a state funds guarantee for the construction of the road and port facilities needed for Red Dog? Hasn't the state opened up new markets by pushing timber and coal exports to Korea and Japan? Those actions hardly seem anti-business.

RICHARDS: Only because a lot of us put immense pressure on them; they came into it kicking and screaming. They were not aggressive, they were not creative, they were not assertive. Then they finally put together a contract with Cominco that was so ineptly written that the Senate had to rewrite the contract...

That's my point, Jim. We've had lots of sound and fury. We've had lots of *soirees* with the governor and his pals through Asia achieving nothing, at the same time, pursuing policies in Southeastern that are severely aggravating logging problems. You've got to look through the words, Jim, and into the actions.