

Election Coverage

As some readers may have suspected, we have not provided much coverage of political campaign activity thus far during this election year. Among the news of Native affairs, one might detect the first sprinkling of election coverage in this week's issue. On the front page, we announce the results of a readership poll on candidate preferences. It was a modest effort and, although we were happy to see many villages participate, we hardly intend it to be an accurate measure of what will happen with the rural vote next month. We did publish our first interview with a gubernatorial candidate, although the topic was largely limited to Native subsistence issues and the individual is assured of a free ride to the general election in any case.

We confess that the lack of political coverage thus far is mostly deliberate. We receive many times over each day the number of press releases the newspaper could use each week, even if it were filled with nothing but political press releases. Not one such release has been published during the campaign. Stories based on reporters' interviews with candidates are even more unwieldy. We would need five times our present staff to keep up with all the politicians.

Still, we have a responsibility to inform our readers about how the candidates stand on the issues, particularly on issues of concern to the Native people. The problem is to figure out how to identify issues about which the Native people feel strongly, and how to provide an opportunity for the statewide candidates to respond to these issues.

One regional Native leader proposed an interesting solution to the problem. He suggested that the Tundra Times and the Alaska Federation of Natives co-host a panel discussion, for us to act as moderators, and provide candidates with a chance to respond to questions raised from concerned Native groups and entities. The plan would be this: Native associations, corporations, villages and organizations would be requested to identify their priority issues and furnish questions based on them to the AFN and us. In a moderated panel discussion, open to public observation, about two weeks or so before the election, we would submit these questions to the candidates and test their responsiveness on issues of concern to the Native community. Then, we would report back on the results. Tundra Times board chairman Willie Hensley told us he recently moderated such a panel for minority interests in Anchorage, and the approach seemed to work well.

Between now and our next deadline, we'll check out the idea a little further. We hope to be able to issue a general invitation to all interested parties in this same space next week.