

Swetzof: Cowper opposed tribalism

by Paul Swetzof
for the Tundra Times

In my opinion Gov. Steve Cowper is not running for re-election in good part because of political reality, not a personal desire to get away from elective office.

OPINION

And, in my opinion, his leaving should provide a good lesson for current and future gubernatorial candidates.

Cowper doesn't stand a chance of carrying Bush Alaska. Most people, in my opinion, would either vote for someone else, or vote for no one. Additionally, Cowper's share of the vote among state employees in Southeast Alaska and the rest of the state wouldn't be very large.

This is political reality.

The traditional Democratic base is Bush, specifically Alaska Natives in the rural areas and non-Natives in Southeast Alaska. Because Anchorage and Fairbanks usually split the vote among the Democratic and Republican parties, any candidate who can't enlist the support of village Alaska and Southeast Alaska can't win the election.

So why, as Cowper must know, can't he win these areas?

Cowper's negotiating position, or to be more accurate, unwillingness to negotiate, with state employees over their wages and benefits has left most of them angry and unwilling to support him. However, he could still squeak by if he could carry village Alaska.

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He can couch what he did in words, but actions speak louder than words. To add insult to injury, every year like clockwork, he would deplore the

tribalism and Native hunting and fishing rights and who isn't willing to put their stated support in writing or at least public statements prior to the election.

The results of ANC's conferences with the candidates will be published, not kept a secret.

It's too bad that we can't say we enjoyed a relationship with outgoing Gov. Cowper. Our only relationship with his administration was adversarial.

It's a pity that Cowper's biases kept him from issuing a proclamation such as that recently made public by the governor of Washington state, Booth Gardner. He states that Washington recognizes the sovereignty of the tribes in Washington, as well as the rights which accompany that sovereignty.

Gardner pledged the state will work cooperatively with the tribes in joint ventures for the good of the tribes and all of the people of Washington.

What a treat it would have been if Cowper were to figure out that the resources of our villages and the state would go much further and be much more productive if Alaska would recognize our inherent sovereignty, including our subsistence rights. Maybe this will happen.

It would be better to be sovereign with the state's cooperation than without it. The state should know, however, that we will be sovereign and, while they may be able to delay us, there is nothing they can do to stop us.

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Native people have lately become more sophisticated when it comes to electing a governor or representatives to the state Legislature. Cowper has taught us all a lesson.

The majority of Native people supported him, as we did Gov. Bill Sheffield and a long line of Democrats, the one exception being Gov. Jay Hammond, a Republican.

What did we get for supporting Cowper? His big southern boot in our face and a position paper and court challenges opposing self-determination and subsistence as an ongoing concept for Native people, the lifeblood of our cultures.

To a lesser extent we got this treat-

ment from Sheffield and Hammond, but Cowper, a lawyer, tried to make an art form out of his opposition to our basic rights.

Our village people are telling the politicians that we are judging their actions with open eyes. Support us and we support you. Don't support us and we support someone else, or if need be, no one.

The Alaska Native Coalition, a voice for Native village Alaska, will be interviewing the major gubernatorial candidates. ANC will not endorse any candidate who isn't friendly toward our Native village governments, who isn't willing to support