

Columnist makes endorsements

By Paul Swetzof

It is almost time to vote for the candidates of our choice for President of the United States, two thirds of Alaska's congressional delegation and representatives to the Alaska legislature.

This year, we have a unique opportunity to vote for national candidates who have indicated a willingness to work to preserve our respective cultures by recognizing that Native governments have a place in this nation and working towards a permanent recognition of Native sovereignty in Alaska. Some of these candidates have also indicated a willingness to support a cultural as well as rural subsistence priority so that Native people's right to hunt and fish for cultural sustenance is protected.

For these reasons, I am endorsing the following candidates:

President - Bill Clinton: Governor Clinton has indicated that he will appoint a tribal advocate to be his Secretary of the Interior. Some of the names men-

tioned for this cabinet position, such as Bruce Babbot, are strong tribal advocates. This would be in strong contrast to George Bush's Secretary of the Interior, Manual Lujan. Lujan and the President have provided a great deal of lip service to tribal sovereignty, but, unfortunately, their actions have not matched their words and the result has been an administration hostile to Native interests in Alaska. The Bush administration has appeased Frank Murkowski's view that meaningful Native self-determination has no place in Alaska. If Bill Clinton wins, Sen. Murkowski, should he be reelected, will not have a voice in his administration.

Alaska's Senator - Tony Smith: Mr. Smith has stated to me and other members of the Native community that he believes that Alaska's tribes have the same standing as outside tribes. He strongly supports the rural preference and believes that Native subsistence rights should be protected. He realizes that Native sovereignty is a federal trust responsibility more than a

state issue. Mr. Smith's opponent, Sen. Frank Murkowski, has been the primary opponent of Native sovereignty in Alaska. He tried, and until he was caught by Native legal advocates, succeeded, in inserting disclaimer language only affecting Alaska Native tribes into "Indian law" legislation. Sen. Murkowski claimed the disclaimer language was only to keep the question of tribal sovereignty legally neutral. This was not true.

Disclaimer language effecting only one state can cause the federal courts to look on Alaska tribes as being somehow different than outside tribes and puts us in the position of being second class Natives in the eyes of the law. The senator was overheard stating to an Interior Department official something to the effect that tribes should not have a place in Alaska. Sen. Murkowski has also indicated that were it feasible, ANILCA should be amended to comply with state law, which would gut what little subsistence protection ANILCA currently

provides. Sen. Murkowski should be commended for supporting Aleut reparations and Native language legislation. However, Tony Smith also supported this legislation and, in fact, these relatively non-controversial issues would have been supported by most, if not all, candidates for the Senate. A respected and tribally oriented Aleut, Larry Mercurieff, is Tony Smith's campaign manager. When it comes to the question of Frank Murkowski, my opinion is that virtually anyone will do a better job for Native people. It is not acceptable, by example, to support Native languages on the one hand while on the other hand, taking actions which, if implemented, could destroy the future of our cultures.

Alaska Representative - John Devens: Mr. Devens supports a rural subsistence preference for the purpose of protecting Native cultures. He is a supporter of tribes. As a member of the majority party in Congress, Mr. Devens will be in a unique position (as will Tony Smith) to translate his pro-self determination beliefs into law. Mr. Devens's opponent, Don Young, has

done a lot for us in the areas of defending a rural subsistence preference and other non-controversial issues such as obtaining funding for Native services and programs. The problem with Don is that he has refused to support Native self-determination, though, to his credit, he has not openly opposed it, and has been relatively ineffective in dealing with the democratic Congress. His confrontational nature can cause the dominant democrats to completely ignore, or worse, to oppose issues of concern to Native people. Don has lost the respect of many of his peers in Congress. It's time for him to come home and get reacquainted with life in Alaska. Don's a pioneer and Native people, as Will Mayo stated so well, cannot afford too many more years of the pioneer spirit.

On the state level, I hope that everyone in the huge interior district gets out to vote for Georgianna Lincoln. Georgianna is a wonderful Native who works hard, against the odds and with a hostile legislature, to support tribal, subsistence and funding issues on our behalf.