

Politics Heavy, Hot

By CHUCK MALLEY

Someone said that there just might be a politician or two at the Tundra Times Banquet this year.

With the banquet Oct. 26, eleven days prior to the general election, the annual fund raiser is certain to draw office seekers from around the state.

The banquet will be held at the Captain Cook Hotel in Anchorage in conjunction with the Alaska Federation of Natives Convention.

Both events will offer Alaska Natives and others a good opportunity to check out the candidates.

Three races hold the spotlight: the governorship, U. S. Senate and U. S. House of Representatives.

The House race holds special interest for Natives because Willie Hensley, a Kotzebue Eskimo Democrat, is hot on the tail of Republican incumbent Don Young, Fort Yukon.

An Alaska Native has never been elected to office in Washington, but many political observers feel Hensley stands an excellent chance of changing that picture this year.

Gov. William A. Egan, who is expected to appear at the Captain Cook, is fighting for his political life against Republican Jay Hammond, the bearded bush pilot from Naknek.

A recent Associated Press poll showed that Egan may be the only incumbent Democratic governor in the country who is in trouble against a Republican opponent.

Hammond won a stunning primary victory against Walter J. Hickel, a wealthy man, former Secretary of the Interior and a former governor of Alaska.

"Hammond toppled a heavy politician," commented one Fairbanks politico. "Can he do it again?"

Many feel that the answer depends on this: Do Alaskans want a new face in the governor's office after 12 years of Bill Egan?

What with Watergate, it seems to be a year of change all over the country, but in most cases it's the Republican administration getting the boot.

Egan's administration is on the right side of Watergate, but the scandal apparently is not a factor in Alaska. What is more of a factor is that the state is in the throws of rapid change and voters must decide who will lead that change.

Egan has accused Hammond of advocating "zero growth" for Alaska. The charge first came from Lt. Gov. H. A. (Red) Boucher, a champion of progress.

Hammond is conservative on growth, but denies a "zero growth" posture. His view is that progress is happening and there's no stopping it; "But it can and must be controlled," he says.

While Boucher's political future depends on Egan's, it's also a year when many voters will make their choice for governor on the basis of his running mate. Boucher has a "super-promoter" image which has jellied well with Egan's long-held attitude of progress for Alaska.

But now, more than four years ago, voters must consider whether Boucher would be the governor they want if for some reason Egan could not finish 16 years in office, a long stretch for a man of any age. Egan is 60.

Hammond is backed up by Lowell Thomas Jr., a man with not just a famous name but a strong legislative background in Alaska government.

While Egan dominates his ticket, Hammond is really not a towering figure over his running mate, thus Thomas adds considerable strength to the Republican ticket. A corollary might be drawn between Hammond and Thomas and President Ford and Rockefeller.

It might also be that many voters will make their choice on the basis of whether they want reigns applied to Alaska's growth, with Hammond, or a continuation of the current pace with Bill Egan.

The Senate race is one of a clear choice — virtually black and white.

Incumbent Democratic Senator Mike Gravel is widely known as a liberal. His challenger, Republican C. R. Lewis, is an arch-conservative and a member of the John Birch Society.

Their polarized positions can be illustrated by their views on marijuana. Gravel would like to see marijuana offenders "de-criminalized;" Lewis is dead against any use of marijuana whatsoever.

Gravel has put in a six-year term in Washington and is still considered young by Senate standards. He was born and raised

in the East. Lewis is a westerner, from Montana, and according to his brochure, came to Alaska in 1939 in the "hold" of a ship.

Both men are doing well financially. Gravel recently built an expensive home in the Washington area. Lewis' stated worth is not too much under \$1 million.