

# Only a handful killed subsistence

by Sen. John Binkley  
for the *Tundra Times*

JUNEAU — If it's true that every legislative session is remembered as much for what didn't happen as for what was accomplished, surely the landmark of disappointment this year was the failure to pass a bill repairing the damage the Alaska Supreme Court has done to our priority subsistence law.

## OPINION

Despite intensive lobbying efforts that continued into the last hour of the session, we came just a few votes short of what we needed to pass a bill that called for a statewide vote on a constitutional amendment restoring priority subsistence rights to rural Alaskans.

Beginning July 1, we now face federal takeover of fish and wildlife management on more than 100 million acres of federal land that the state currently manages. Many people believe that is going to be an unworkable situation, especially in trying to manage migrating animals such as caribou that wander back and forth across state and federal boundary lines.

The sad part about this issue is that only a handful of legislators were involved in refusing to let Alaskans solve the problem through a constitutional amendment vote. The overwhelming vote in favor of subsistence in 1982 and polls taken since clearly indicate the amendment would have been approved, because most Alaskans believe protecting subsistence for rural residents is the right thing to do.

My guess is the Legislature will have no choice but to take up subsistence again in a special session. And I suspect if the governor doesn't call the session, we'll do it ourselves.

Whenever and however it happens, I hope we'll have better luck persuading that small group of legislators to let the people of Alaska once again demonstrate how they feel about subsistence through the ballot box.

Fortunately, there were successes we can talk about in looking back at this session, too. Some of the ones I'm happiest about include:

- An increase in the amount of minimum entitlements for municipalities. Legislation passed this year changes the formula beginning in July 1991, the minimum for all communities in the unincorporated areas will — I hope — increase from \$25,000 to \$40,000.

- An adequate operating budget for

Rural Alaska Television Network, including a small amount of funds for the board of directors to begin seriously working on the issue of removing alcohol ads from programming.

While my bill to require removal of such advertising from RATNet shows did not make it out of the House, the issue is still very much alive.

- A package of bills dealing with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, the most important being a requirement that school districts and Rural Education Attendance Areas provide in-service training for teachers and other personnel on ways to work with children exposed to alcohol and other drugs before birth.

Other FAS bills that passed require information about FAS and Fetal Alcohol Effects be provided with marriage license applications and mail order alcohol shipments, and ask schools, health providers and all Alaskans generally to learn more about FAS and help pregnant women avoid this tragic situation.

And to help heighten our awareness, one of the bills marks the week following Mother's Day as Alcohol-Related Birth Defects Awareness Week.

- An appropriation of \$548,000 to develop a comprehensive package of services aimed at improving treatment for substance abusing pregnant women. These state funds are aimed

at matching federal dollars recently allocated for a new treatment facility in Anchorage. The facility is due to open this year.

- An appropriation of \$5 million for the Yupik Cultural Center in Bethel. Combined with the \$1 million we provided last session, this will adequately fund the center, which will be administered by the University of Alaska.

The center will be a repository for artifacts from the Yupik culture that currently are scattered throughout the world, and I believe this will be a major attraction for visitors to the Y-K Delta.

But more important, it will be a source of pride for Native residents in the region to be able to view firsthand the history of their culture. There wasn't much sensitivity to such matters in the early days of Alaska's exploration and development.

- A bill requiring the state to establish an education policy and, more important, creating community advisory groups that regional school boards must consult with on a regular basis as a way of monitoring school performance. This legislation provides a vehicle for more local involvement, and I believe it will substantially help Alaska's schools do a better job of preparing our children for adulthood.