

Special subsistence session may be held

by Rep. Eileen P. MacLean
for the Tundra Times

As the legislative session nears its conclusion, many bills are still available for consideration and some divisive issues remain unresolved.

Inupiat Paitot People's Heritage **OPINION**

Fellow Bush Caucus members have formed an alliance to increase our leverage in ensuring that various bills and issues favorably impact our districts.

Here's an update on the status of several controversial bills and issues that have potential statewide implications as deliberations intensify during the last week of the legislative session.

Subsistence

Securing subsistence rights is my top priority this session and a key issue in the legislature, but I am concerned that time is running out on subsistence as the legislature moves toward adjournment.

Efforts in the Senate have ground to a halt with no bills moving. In the House, subsistence bills largely have been stalled until last weekend, when a House bill finally moved out of the

Resources Committee.

The House Resources Committee adopted Rep. Lyman Hoffman's (D-Bethel) amendment, incorporating the measure into Rep. George Jacko's (D-Pedro Bay) constitutional amendment.

Hoffman's amendment would simply allow the state to manage subsistence in agreement with federal law.

Now the measure resides in the House Judiciary Committee, where a hearing was held recently and various drafts were debated, but there was no action to move any form of the resolution from committee.

There may be a special session held shortly after the regular session adjourns to address subsistence.

I support a special session because this issue is too crucial to be dealt with along with unrelated issues. Resolving the subsistence crisis should dominate all of our attention and energy.

Oil Spill Bills

The final oil spill legislation to be acted on by the House this session passed on reconsideration Wednesday, May 2.

HB 567, requirements for spill contingency plans and demonstration of financial responsibility, is being worked on and revised in the Senate Oil and Gas Committee to make it more palatable to Senators.

One key area of concern is the requirement for Department of En-

vironmental Conservation contingency plans for onshore facilities, including exploration wells and production facilities. Language being drafted would tighten those definitions, allowing for example, one contingency plan to cover a unitized oilfield rather than requiring each separate production facility in a field to get new contingency plans approved.

This is a new authority for DEC. Onshore oilfield operations now file spill prevention plans with Department of Natural Resources, as part of lease requirements.

I especially agree with the development of specific contingency plans that HB 567 would mandate to respond efficiently and effectively to minimize the impact of oil spills. I feel this is very needed in Western Alaska and statewide.

I expect this bill to be returned to the House floor for concurrence on the Senate changes before the legislature adjourns in that there is an indication that this bill is a majority priority legislation.

SB 15 — Teacher's Right to Strike Bill

Amid much democratic majority pressure to bring SB 15 to the House floor for a vote, we rural legislators have agreed to vote with the majority on the condition that an amendment to the bill be adopted.

The amendment that I'm working on

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would allow local districts a way out of the right to strike provision. I agree with local district control of this matter because the impact of teachers striking has different effects on rural areas as opposed to urban centers of the state.

In most rural areas, children participate and display a vital role in subsistence hunting and fishing. Often, children must juggle their school schedules with subsistence activities.

If a strike occurred during the school season, classes would have to be extended into the summer in order to make up for classroom days missed by a strike. This would greatly interfere with summertime fishing and hunting and would place children in a terrible bind.

What would they do? Go to school to make up classes, or participate in hunts which are necessary for their survival?

Obviously, survival activities would supersede education, and in the end, our children's education would suffer.

I am developing my amendment to address these concerns, which I feel will improve SB 15.