

Editorial —

Reason needed

What is most disappointing about the current controversy over the annual seal harvest on St. Paul in the Pribilof Islands is the misinformation that is being bandied about by environmentalist groups which oppose the harvest.

Not only is it dissappointing. It's also disenheartening, particularly to those most directly affected and involved in the operation — the Aleuts who live on the islands.

They have been more than gracious to those groups opposed to the harvest, welcoming them to their homes and attempting to explain both the economic and biologic dynamcics of the operation. Most of the existing data seem to support the Aleuts' position that the harvest should not be stopped.

They point out that since the well regulated and supervised harvest started in 1911, the fur seal herd, which then was near extinction, has increased to a stable population of about 1.4 million animals.

The Aleuts and the National Marine Fisheries Service, which runs the annual operation, have over 60 years' of statistics and research information which conclusively demonstrate that, viewed as a conservation measure, the controlled harvest has led to and maintaine and sustained a large and health herd.

They have figures also that indicate that, for the most part, the annual harvest has earned a net profit over the years, much of this money has been returned to the islands either directly in the form of wages, or indirectly in the form of services for the community. At least the money earned has offset some of the costs of government services there. This makes the Pribilof Island communities somewhat unusual in Alaska. They are, at least to some extent paying their own way for the various services provided them.

And, the Pribilovians have additional, well accepted data that indicates that the method of taking the seals is one of the most humane available to them.

Yet, all the patient explanations, all the empirical data is ignored. Instead, some environmentalist groups seem determined to follow an emotional campaign of misinformation and propaganda designed to end the harvest no matter what the facts may indicate. And, after accepting the Aleuts' hospitality, they return to remote areas like Washington, D.C., where they completely misrepresent what little they might have learned.

This is hardly a reasonable way in which to operate, no matter what one's emotional committemént to the issue, no matter what its merits.