

# Sen. Hensley on Bush Politics—

## 'No question that the rural areas carried a big stick'

By SEN. WILLIE HENSLEY

The Second Session of the Seventh Alaska Legislature is now history. It was the longest session since Statehood lasting 161 days. Despite all the criticisms that will be leveled at the leadership for the length of the session, substantial new departures were made in state policy.

From the point of view of the "bush" legislator I believe that, in comparison with past years, more equity prevailed in the spending of state monies. Much of the rural spending will depend on voter approval of bond issues on such items as schools, airports, and local service roads.

Yet, the budget document itself reflects a growing consideration for state obligations in the areas of revenue sharing for municipal services, greater local government powers and responsibilities, rural development projects and improved educational programs.

There is no question that the rural areas carried a big stick in the past two years due to the unity of bush legislators in put-

ting Rep. George Hohman in the chairmanship of the House finance committee.

Furthermore, there is substantially improved understanding of rural areas due to the active participation of bush legislators in committee work and among various state agencies.

While the Senate has not generally been known for breaking new ground in rural problems, the past session showed that the Senate can respond by the passage of the Bilingual education package, Medicaid, rural pioneer home appropriations and groundbreaking legislation in new development cities concepts.

It was also helpful to the rural areas to have had Sen. Jay Hammond of Naknek in the Senate Presidency. His support was necessary to much bush legislation and to portions of the Governor's program.

In the next installment of my legislative report I will discuss various forces that were at work in the legislature as they affected the rural areas of the state and discuss specific pieces of legisla-

tion in some detail.

I will review certain bond issues and their affect on the bush, describe new programs such as Medicaid, bilingual education, National Guard Retirement, Native claims implementation, Regional Corporation loans by the State, educational broadcasting facilities, the old age longevity bonus, fishing and tourism loans, the Uniform Alcoholism Act, reapportionment, the Governor's cents-per-barrel tax and its affect on the two percent share of oil revenues to go to the Native corporations, unorganized borough proposals and other items of interest to the bush.

I have always felt that what's good for the bush is good for the urban areas. There must be advancements and improvements in the bush along with similar movements in the rest of the state, otherwise Alaska will surely grow divergently; creating disunity and future distress. It is incumbent on the state to recognize and understand the problems of the bush in order that they be dealt with properly.