

# Cowper: Projects to provide needed jobs

by Gov. Steve Cowper

for the Tundra Times

JUNEAU — I recently signed into law a public works budget that will fund more than \$350 million worth of projects and provide much needed jobs around Alaska.

This package is good news for rural communities which will receive one of every three state dollars spent on capital projects.

Villages from Saxman to St. George and Klukwan to Kivalina will soon see important improvements in critical services, such as runway repairs, upgraded water and sewer systems, expanded power generation and erosion control.

When the 1987 Legislature adjourned in May it made history. For the first time since Statehood lawmakers left Juneau without approving a capital budget.

Bear in mind that a big chunk of construction money from the year before — \$163 million — had been held up by the previous administration because the state couldn't pay for the projects after oil prices dropped drastically in 1986.

I was able to release that money in May so that Alaskans could take advantage of the construction season. But I also wanted an affordable capital budget for the coming year, too.

My administration asked for nearly \$61 million to pay for necessary projects around the state in 1987. I thought it was important that the capital budget, which had stalled in the Legislature, be approved, so I asked legislators to come back to Juneau and



finish the job.

After a two-day special session, the Legislature adopted my proposal along with another \$34 million in additional projects. And, more than \$9 million unused from past projects was rechanneled into new ones.

The state's total capital budget of nearly \$105 million will attract \$260 million in federal dollars. On top of substantial state money for local projects, villages will also get a share of federal funds for harbor and runway improvements. My administration is committed to making sure that rural areas get an equitable slice of the federal public works pie.

Nearly all of this year's capital projects are necessary for economic development or for life, safety and health; two deserve particular mention.

Completion of the St. George har-

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bor for \$5.7 million could mean 200 jobs for on-shore processing and may attract \$300 million in additional improvements by private companies who want to locate there. And, a \$2 million repair of the Unalaska water system will enable fish processors to operate on-shore, providing jobs for local residents.

Several communities, including Ambler, Noatak, Noorvik, Koyukuk, Aniak, Huslia, Newtok, Kwethluk and

Nunapitchuk will receive help with erosion control, which is a critical issue for a number of river communities.

Rural airports will be upgraded in Sand Point, False Pass, Dillingham, Galena, Golovin, Nome, Barrow, Elim, Deering, Teller, Kotzebue, Tatitlek, Atkasuk, among others.

Water and sewer improvements have been funded for Saxman, Klawock, Thorne Bay, Buckland, Kaktovik, Kobuk, Wainwright, Beaver, Sleetmute, Kalskag, Mekoryuk, Platinum, Aleknagik, Sand Point, Unalaska, Chignik, King Cove and Karluk.

Sheldon Point and Toksook Bay get new boardwalks and several villages will be able to fix up their community centers.

Electrification projects in Ruby, Chalkyitsik, Koyukuk, Quinhagak, Chignik Lake and Perryville will get a boost.

This year's public works budget is a fraction of what the state spent just a few years ago, but it's certainly the most responsible capital budget the state has seen in sometime. For rural Alaska, it makes sense. It's needed, and it's affordable.