

Apportionment issue needs thinking

By LAURY ROBERTS

An innovative realignment of election districts will have to be devised if rural areas are to retain the present level of representation when the legislature is reapportioned in 1981.

Districts will be redrawn, following the completion of the 1980 census, based on the "one man one vote" doctrine held by the U.S. Supreme Court. This will equalize the number of constituents per legislator to conform with an updated population count.

It is likely that fully half of the entire 60-member legislature will come from the Anchorage area by the 1983 session, although the rate of population growth there is slowing in comparison to recent years. Presently 8 of 20 Senate members are from the state's most populated spot, as are 16 of 40 House members. Three senators are now from rural communities, and 8 representatives belong to the House bush caucus (including Rep. Jim Duncan, D-Juneau).

"I don't believe that our urban center should set

policy in the state," said Sen. Frank Ferguson (D-Kotzebue). "It's not healthy."

Gov. Jay Hammond will appoint a bi-partisan commission which must present a reapportionment plan to him within 45 days of when the census is submitted. The governor then has the same number of days to declare the new districts. He has the power to change the plan offered by the commission.

"Gov. Hammond would like very much to see adequate rural representation," said Attorney General Avrum Gross. "We need people with knowledge about vast areas of the state." Hammond was prevented from seeking a Senate seat in the Bristol Bay area under the Egan administration reappor-

● Issue

(Continued from Page One)
tionment plan of 1974.

Gross said the toughest part will be reapportioning the Senate. While the House of Representatives has always been apportioned according to population, Senate districts are described in the state constitution.

He added that Hammond is "toying" with ideas on how to comply with state and federal constitutions without pre-empting bush representation. For instance, Anchorage could be cut up like a pie with districts fanning out to rural areas. Another option could be statewide selection of candidates from specific districts.

"If there is a sense it's in the public interest to have rural representation in the legislature there are innovative ways to do it," said Byron Mallott, chair-

man of the board of Sea-
laska, the state's largest regional Native corporation. "But it will take a lot of work and research." Mallott has been named as a likely candidate to serve on the reapportionment commission.

"The majority of the population lives in small areas, while vast areas — where the future of Alaska is coming from — is where a small number of people live," said Mallott. "Their concerns are just as important as urban concerns. That will compel us to look at reapportionment very closely."

Mallott warned it "could cause trouble by playing with numbers now."

"Speculation prior to the census could lead to polarization of attitudes based on information that may not be valid afterwards," Mallott said.