

# Statewide Participation Conference

A statewide Citizens Participation Conference was held in Juneau March 27 through the 29th, marking the beginning of a political education program sponsored by the Rural Alaska Development Group.

Gordon Jackson, executive director of the Southeastern Alaska Community Action Program, took this opportunity to urge all rural interest groups, native associations, and the "bush caucus" of representatives from the House to begin a coordinated effort to pass those bills which are of the greatest importance to rural areas and to block those pieces of legislation which are directly harmful.

"Until this time," Mr. Jackson stated, "the advocates for rural Alaskans have made feeble and sporadic attempts to initiate an efficient lobbying campaign. Further delay will only result in disappointment and a decision by default."

In the final hectic weeks of

the Seventh Legislature, there are many bills of critical importance pending. They cover such diversified subjects as school bonds, medical clinics, pipeline construction, oil spillage, funding of regional corporations, low-cost housing, sea mammals, and roads.

SEACAP leaders felt that two acts proposed are overtly hostile to rural interests. Senate Bill 384, "An Act relating to closed hunting areas adjacent to the highways," would "seriously interfere with the pattern of subsistence hunting in his region", according to a Rural CAP director.

In the Copper River Drainage, SB 384 would close all public highways to hunting. Since most of this region's hunting takes place from the highway network and the region's people lack access to the more isolated game populations, the bill as presently worded could work an unreasonable hardship on the population in the Copper River Valley.

There was also concern about House Bill 720, which would require a borough petition to pass before the Legislature for its approval. The Legislature would retain the power of veto.

Presently, only the Local Boundary Commission can veto a petition. Introduced only a few days after the approval of the North Slope Borough, this act seemed to SEACAP to be a deliberate attempt to discourage future attempts by rural areas to

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create borough organizations.

Mr. Jackson emphasized the importance of making the voters' views known to the legislators, "very soon". The outcome of each individual bill will play a part in shaping Alaska's future.

"Petitions and letters of support as well as condemnation will have a significant impact upon your representatives. There is no reason for the important rural interests to be overshadowed and ignored during the final weeks of the session, if we act now."