

Bush gears for legislature

By NANCY HARVEY

With the start of the 1979 Legislature only a week away state lawmakers are drifting into Juneau with their thoughts focused on legislative priorities for this year's session.

And, when the call to order takes place on January 15, many familiar rural legislators will be returning to take their places in the first session of the 11th Alaska State Legislature.

Kotzebue Senator Frank Ferguson, (D-Kotzebue), the only rural senator to face re-election this year, will be returning to Juneau after defeating his opponent Tony Schuerch of Kiana.

Senator George Hohman, (D-Bethel), who made an unsuccessful bid for the lieutenant governor's position in the August primary, and Senator John Sackett (R-Galena) also return to the State Senate this month. If the current Senate organizational structure holds, Sackett will once again chair the powerful Senate Finance Committee for his third consecutive year.

In the House, veteran legislators Nels Anderson (D-Dillingham) and Leo Schaeffer (D-Kotzebue) ran unopposed in November and won by heavy margins. Incumbent Representative Al Osterback (D-Sand Point) defeated Stanley Mack for the lone seat in District 15, and in a close race Phillip Guy will once again represent District 17 after narrowly defeating Bethel resident John Malone.

Three freshmen legislators will add their names to those aligned with the "Bush Caucus" this session. Fred Zharoff (D-Kodiak) won an unopposed election in District 14. In the Yukon River District 18, Vern Hurlbert (D-Sleetmute) defeated incumbent legislator Billy Akers, and a little further north Jack Fuller (D-Nome) a long time resident edged out Bob Evans to re-

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present District 20 in Juneau.

At least one member of the house rural delegation may be in line for a leadership position when democrats organize next week. Rep. Nels Anderson, unanimously elected chairman of the powerful bush caucus holding seven votes, has declared himself a candidate for speaker.

House Democrats have been attempting to organize the top four leadership positions for several weeks with another meeting scheduled the day before the 1979 session begins. The key leadership positions include: Speaker, Rules Chairman, Finance Committee Chairman and Majority Leader. Geographic considerations will likely play a major role in determining the disposition of key positions with leadership positions probably divided among the four areas of Anchorage, Fairbanks, Southeast and the Bush.

According to Anderson the bush delegation is "100 per cent" behind him in his quest for the Speakers position. Anderson said most of the freshmen bush legislators are interested in seats on several different committees including: Resources, State Affairs and Judiciary. Rep. Leo Schaeffer is said to be interested in the position of Vice Chairman of the Finance Committee and Rep. Al Osterback in chairing the Resources Committee. Osterback chaired the House Resources Committee during the last
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session of the Legislature.

Bush Priorities

In an interview with the Tundra Times Rep Anderson outlined several of the important issues he sees facing rural representatives during the 1979 Legislative session.

Fish and Game Management — Anderson says the legislature must continue to monitor the progress of the new Section of Subsistence in the Department of Fish and Game to insure the objectives of H.B. 960 (the subsistence bill passed last June) are implemented as quickly as possible. According to Anderson he will most likely seek to have the Section

elevated to the Division status. A move originally in the subsistence bill but defeated on the Senate floor before passage of the final legislation.

Anderson says the interim Subsistence Committee spent considerable time working on a draft bill this summer to regionalize state fish and game management, and he plans to introduce such a bill this session.

School Construction — Monitoring of existing school construction programs needs to be an on-going progress, Anderson said. Additionally a number of schools already constructed need to be brought up to code.

Boat Harbors — Anderson sees the need for an aggressive

boat harbor program in the state with construction of facilities particularly needed in Western and Northwestern Alaska.

Energy — This issue has not been adequately addressed by the state according to Anderson. Alternative possible sources of energy need to be explored in depth by the legislature this year.

Anderson also cited as potential issues for the bush delegation to address this year; rural health care systems; and airport construction and renovation.

Anderson sees this year's legislative session running anywhere from 90 to 100 days and being a relatively "quiet and uneventful" year.