

Judge on Merit

The attention paid the third branch of government — the depending upon one's point of view or particular circumstances at the moment.

Recently, the Alaska judiciary has come under increased scrutiny, much of it critical. This is especially so since studies released last year revealed the possibility that there may exist within the system conscious or unconscious racial bias, with Natives and members of other minorities receiving stiffer sentences than do their fellow citizens.

Several groups, within and without the judicial system, are examining that problem. And, to its credit, the court system itself is taking steps to correct whatever inequities might exist. We will have to wait — we hope not too long — to see to what extent any reforms are made along that line.

In the meantime, however, there is a chance to improve the system right now. And, we hope that Gov. Jay Hammond takes advantage of that opportunity.

Last week, the Alaska Judicial Council came out with the names of four persons, selected from a long list of applicants after an arduous screening process, whom it considered worthy to fill the seat on Anchorage's Superior Court bench made vacant by the untimely death of Superior Court Judge Peter Kalamaredes last spring.

The governor has about 40 more days in which to decide which of the four should be elevated to the bench. That decision should be made purely on the basis of merit. The only question the governor should ask himself when choosing among the four is whether the person under consideration will make a good judge, one who will be a credit to and perhaps improve a troubled and not particularly well understood court system.

It is too important a position to be filled by any other criteria than who is best legally and temperamentally qualified to do the best job possible under difficult and trying circumstances. Though there might be an understandable temptation to let political or other considerations play a part in his choice, this is one area in which the governor has the power of appointment that he should valiantly withstand such temptations and make his decision purely on merit and ability.

The court system, especially in these troubled times, deserves no less, nor, certainly, do we.