

Forgive and forget

Last weekend the Democratic Party extended the olive branch of peace to a large segment of Alaska that it had shunned in April when it had voted to withhold support from four rural legislators who participated in the House majority coalition.

Those representatives, Al Adams of Kotzebue, Jack Fuller of Nome, Vern Hurlbert of Sleetmute, and Bette Cato of Valdez, bolted the party during the 1981 "coup" which saw Democrats lose their grasp on majority power.

The main reason for that "coup" was because of Democratic leadership inability to lead the House to any solid action. And that inaction was hurting the rural areas of Alaska whose representatives gave Democrats the majority they needed.

Party loyalties are all well and good, but are meaningless if nothing comes of it. To these members of the Bush caucus, nothing was coming of their support of the party in 1981.

When Adams, Hurlbert, Fuller and Cato decided to join a House majority coalition made up of Republicans and Libertarians, they did so because the interests of their constituents were at stake.

The benefits from joining the House majority coalition were obvious from the start. Al Adams became chairman of the powerful House Finance Committee. Jack Fuller became chairman of the equally powerful House Rules Committee. Many rural legislators got seats on the Finance and Rules committees.

In addition the coalition agreed that subsistence as an issue would not be brought up on the floor of the House. That vital decision now rests with the people of the state.

Those simple facts were worth the move.

Under this peace plan, the Democratic State Central Committee will send a copy of the party platform to the four who will be asked to sign their support. At that time, moral and financial support will be forthcoming.

This is nothing more or less than will be required from any other state Democrat, says committee chairwoman Dianne Anderson O'Connell.

That is as it should be.

We will not at this time judge the effectiveness of the 1982 Legislature. That will wait for another editorial.

But we do submit that the four Bush caucus members who decided to work with the Republicans should not have been punished for their decisions. They made those decisions based on politics — the politics of responsiveness by the Republican party, and non-responsiveness by the Democratic party.

A state representative should vote his conscience and if it means going with the "other" group to benefit his district, that's what he must do.

It is good that the Democratic Party has come to recognize that simple fact. We hope that this latest action will heal some serious wounds within the party and benefit the people of rural Alaska.