

Cowper attitude refreshing

Gov. Steve Cowper gave his State of the State speech last week, and in it he discussed the need to for state government to be sensitive to the uniqueness of Alaska Native cultures.

We find that attitude refreshing, and we hope the governor will back up his statement with policies that reflect the need to recognize that we have a number of cultures in Alaska.

What the governor said was, "I believe the villages are fundamentally different, culturally and historically, from urban Alaska." That one statement appears to indicate that Cowper recognizes that rural Alaska has special needs.

It's particularly important in these days of budget cut-backs for state officials to be sensitive to rural areas. At the same time, we must raise a note of caution about Cowper's suggestion that new forms of village government be created.

First, Cowper has suggested that the state look at creating new structures within the framework of the Alaska Constitution. This approach most likely cannot satisfy the concerns raised by groups such as the Alaska Native Coalition.

In addition, we would like to point out that the problem of rural Alaska may be more one of policy than of structures.

There already are numerous structures developed for rural Alaska communities and government entities. The problem, however, seems to be that the policy of state government prevents these structures from meeting the unique needs of Alaska's rural Native population.

Solving this dilemma admittedly will not be easy, but we are pleased to see that the new governor is willing to try.