

Impeachment quashed!

The Senate acknowledged that there will be no impeachment of Gov. Bill Sheffield by passing a resolution which essentially vindicates the chief executive from any wrongdoing in its role in the awarding of a \$9.1 million Fairbanks office lease. The resolution states:

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE:

WHEREAS the Alaska State Senate, meeting in Juneau in Special Session on the recommendation of a Grand Jury, has considered the question of the impeachment of Governor William J. Sheffield;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Senate, after lengthy testimony, does not find clear and convincing evidence that William J. Sheffield

has committed an impeachable offense; and be it **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Senate condemns favoritism in any state leasing process, and that the Senate continues to support the expeditious consolidation of state offices in the Fairbanks area; this goal must be accomplished fairly and equitably, with equal opportunity for all.

The vote to adopt the resolution was 12-8. The voting went strictly according to party lines with the exceptions of Sens. Don Bennett, Dick Eliason and John Sackett voting with the Democrats to pass the non-critical resolution.

The Legislature has been in special session since July 15 in

response to a grand jury's recommendation that it consider the evidence in the state leasing of the Fifth Avenue Center in Fairbanks.

The grand jury, though it chose not to indict anyone, accused Gov. Sheffield and then-Chief of Staff John Shively of "serious abuse of office."

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No impeachment

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After weeks of testimony and debate, the Senate Rules Committee concluded that there was no "clear and convincing" evidence that Gov. Sheffield had committed an impeachable offense.

The report issued by the Rules Committee, however, in spite of its findings, was highly critical of the governor, stating at one point that "the Governor (sic) exhibited almost verbatim recall of conversations and events that were favorable to him and a substantial lack of recall of events that might reflect upon him unfavorably." In addition, the report states that "the manner in which the Fairbanks office consolidation lease contract was awarded is absolutely unacceptable," and, "that there was a clear failure on the part of the governor to set the tone for his administration: a failure to declare standards of appropriate conduct for his appointees." The committee's report need not be approved by the entire Senate in order to be part of the legislative record. The Rules Committee is dominated by Republicans by a margin of 4-1, and some senators and voters have questioned whether or not it was this factor which caused the impeachment

proceedings to be "thrown" to the Rules.

The report drew angry responses from some senators. Ketchikan Sen. Bob Zeigler argued that the Rules Committee, in issuing a report critical of the governor without recommending an impeachment motion, was "copping out."

"You're taking the same approach the grand jury took," said Zeigler. Zeigler also said the Rules Committee report was "weasel language."

Bob Miller of the Governor's office was able to give the *Tundra Times* a statement in response to the Senate action.

"We never expected an impeachment motion," said Miller. "We think it's significant that the Rules Committee found no 'clear and convincing' evidence to warrant impeachment, but their report resembles more a Republican party campaign document than a Rules Committee report. We appreciate Sen. Josephson's supplemental report. We also think it is very significant that there were no other bidders for the Fairbanks office lease. The choice of the Fifth Avenue Center was a good public policy decision. We are very relieved to be nearing the end of this matter."

The Rules Committee report



Gov. Bill Sheffield and Chief of Staff Ray Gillespie entering the Baranof Hotel in Juneau last week.

was adopted 5-0, with Sen. Josephson of Anchorage submitting the supplemental report referred to by Miller.

When it became apparent that the Rules Committee was not going to recommend impeachment for the governor, Republican Sen. Jack Coghill of Nenana drafted a resolution condemning

Sheffield for his role in the Fairbanks office lease. Coghill received some aid in the drafting of the resolution, which only barely stopped short of calling the governor a liar, from Republican Sen. Jan Faiks of Anchorage, who regaled fellow senators with a didactic display of her former skill as a schoolteacher, complete

with "coloring book" visual aids.

But the full Senate, many of whose members have been quietly waiting for their chance to make some meaningful comment throughout the process of the hearings, apparently thought the Coghill/Faiks resolution was not representative of the feelings of the Senate as a whole.