

A good start

There is something basically scary about the way we elect our government leaders.

We used to have an electoral process where the candidate was known to those who cast their votes and voters could be reasonably certain they would know how their candidate would act in office.

Not so any more.

We now live in a world where there are too many people and too much space between them to allow each to meet and get to know their would-be "leader."

So, we are forced to look at a person's combed and coached image on a 19-inch television screen and read accounts of his words to make up our minds if we respect and believe in him enough to cast our votes in his favor.

Once the vote is cast we hold our breaths and hope that the real man lives up to the television promise.

With this in mind we have watched the first month of the Sheffield administration with much interest.

We supported Sheffield in November because of his apparent willingness to listen and because he seemed to be the type of person who would not make slap-dash decisions and close his mind to the needs of people because of some dogmatic conviction.

It is, of course, too early to give even a preliminary verdict on Mr. Sheffield's performance in office. He is facing a lot of problems that he perhaps didn't anticipate and one month does not an administration make.

But there are some things about this one-month kick-off that give the hope that this will be more than just another state administration.

And that is that, despite the fact that Sheffield has his own beliefs about what is wrong with state government, he fielded several teams of people to thoroughly study all the departments of state government.

Those teams were made up of Alaskans who are well acquainted with how to run things and they spent many intensive days interviewing employees and researching state government to come up with some well thought out recommendations on what is and isn't good, efficient and productive about our state government.

This is something that has long been needed and we feel it should be done on an annual basis instead of only after a new administration takes over.

Government often tends to listen only to those in government. People tend to believe that 'only those people who deal with state government can understand the problems I face' therefore 'civilian criticism' is worthless.

That's silly. A fresh view of things is always beneficial. From what we have seen of the transition team reports, Sheffield is getting a good practical view of the administration he has assumed control of.

We hope his administration is as efficient in dealing with the recommendations as he was in getting them.

Another encouraging Sheffield first-month sign is his practice of recruiting people who haven't necessarily applied for political jobs to work for him.

We know of many people who have taken various jobs in the new administration who hadn't applied and whose only ties to the job seem to be their reputations for good, hard, quality work.

Those people are coming from all areas of the state, from all backgrounds and heritages.

This is the course of Sheffield's current appointments. We hope he stays on that course. If he does, this millionaire hotelier who had only business experience may be one pretty good governor.