

Last Friday, Nels Anderson, a Democratic Representative from Dillingham, announced that he would be a candidate for Governor in 1978.

Anderson's entry into the governor's race raises the inevitable question, raised every time a Native Alaskan has run for public office in Alaska: can he represent all Alaskans? We are not prepared to answer that question specifically, but before this race gets too old, we would like to remove the question from the realm of emotion and political cliches and dress it with a little more meaning and substance.

The main reason the legislative Bush Caucus was convened was to force other legislators, state bureaucrats and the governor's office to be more accountable to rural residents who have been ignored or taken for granted. In a legislature often dominated by urban lawmakers, rural representatives have often had an uphill battle convincing their colleagues of the validity of rural claims for state dollars and state sympathy in policy-making. This quest for parity in recent years has created a certain amount of resentment among urban politicians, who often share the misguided views of their constituents that Natives, who comprise the rural majority, have had it made in the shade since the passage of the land claims settlement act in 1971.

After stressing that few Natives have discovered new wealth and riches, we suggest that state policy makers, of every stripe, are accountable to all Alaskans, regardless of changing tides of majority opinion. If this is true of today's bureaucrats and incumbent public trustees, certainly it is not unfair to ask candidates for such positions where they feel their accountability lies.

In other words, rather than assuming that a candidate for statewide public office, who hails from the bush, will always put rural needs above the good of all Alaskans, and questioning that candidate's ability to see beyond the hills that surround his tiny hometown, perhaps an equal burden should be placed upon an urban candidate to demonstrate his or her ability to see beyond the ice fog that shrouds Fairbanks or the ring of suburban communities that are climbing the Chugach Mountains around Anchorage.

Rather than discard a rural candidate simply because that candidate is from a rural area, we would urge that a uniform standard be applied to all who seek the governor's chair. We suggest that one measure of a person's ability to represent a largely diverse population is the fairness with which competing claims for state money and resources are treated; another is a person's sensitivity to recognize valid complaints of minority and local interests stemming from bullying by other more powerful interests, either within or without the state. Perhaps the most difficult test for someone claiming to administer to the needs of constituents with different problems is to be able to tell a clamoring majority that their claims, in direct conflict with a struggling minority, are simply wrong and unfair. And if a leader can pull that off and win re-election the next time around, certainly that leader will have proven a knack for reasonableness and statesmanship worthy of admiration.

Sound idealistic, unrealistic? Perhaps the standards are too high. If so, less demanding standards may be developed. But if they are developed, let them be applied across the board. Let's not apply an easier standard to a candidate for statewide office simply because we like his rhetoric only to turn and apply a more rigid standard to a candidate simply because his house cannot be reached by a

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highway.

All candidates for governor in the next election have a lot of explaining to do to all Alaskan voters. The race is young. This newspaper tries to represent the needs of a lot of Alaskans whose needs are not well understood or appreciated by many politicians. The voters of rural Alaska are listening and waiting. They take their future and that of their children very seriously. They expect no more of a man or woman before lending an ear to what they have to say.

JRR