

Plea for Bush funding

An open letter to Governor Bill Sheffield

Dear Gov. Sheffield:

This last week I read about your proposed budget for the upcoming year in the Anchorage Times newspaper. After reading about your 50% cut in funds for Capital Projects and the inclusion of the dam projects in this category, I have contacted several governmental agencies to see what they had to say. It appears from the consensus, that this budget will cut the amount of money spent for necessary improvements to the majority of cities, communities and villages of Alaska that need the funds the most.

I believe it is time for all of us to take a second look, or maybe the first look, at what is happening in this beautiful state of Alaska. My family and I live in Anchorage, and we are thankful for what the City and State has done for us. We have good roads to travel; sewage and solid waste disposal sites; safe water to drink and bathe in; good schools for our children to attend; emergency services such as police, fire protection, and hospitals; public transportation; sports arenas; convention centers; continuous utilities such as electricity, natural

gas and telephones; parks and recreation facilities; thus giving us almost immediate access to whatever we wish to do.

We, at ABBESSCO, have spent most of this past year working with the residents of Aniak and Chuathbaluk on their Capital projects. Our main job is to provide materials, tools and on the job training for the people working on these projects in their cities and villages. We are part of the Force Accounting systems used by the people of these communities to construct and complete the projects they have chosen to undertake. With the use of this system, the majority of the labor force are the residents of the community, thus keeping a very large portion of the labor monies spent within the community, along with the learning of new skills and the pride in participating. It was proven this past year in Chuathbaluk that a large construction project could be undertaken with the City acting as the general contractor, local residents hired to work on the project with on the job training, and completion on schedule with the same quality of workmanship for about two-thirds the cost of a bid project.

This past year all of us associated with ABBESSCO have

learned a lot about working in bush Alaska. We have struggled with lack of tools, delivery of materials, transportation, lodging and meals, and most recently last month with the weather. Most important we have been taught by the people of these villages about their heritage and lifestyles. We have shown our respect for this, and have in turn gained the respect of these people. In some instances, going out into bush Alaska is like traveling to another country, and learning the traditions and expectations of different people. This observation has brought me to the point of expressing my views on what I believe our moral obligations and priorities should be.

It is true that my company benefits monetarily now and will in the future from Capital projects undergone in the bush. However, no more so than hundreds of other businesses throughout Alaska and the lower 48. No matter what the Capital projects budget is cut to, I will probably still maintain more bush work than I ever will be able to handle.

I am not writing to you complaining about the lack of money going into my pocket. I am writing to you as a concerned resident who has experienced the
(Continued on Page Eleven)

Plea for Bush funding

(Continued from Page Ten)

quality of life Alaska has to offer, but who has also experienced the hardships Alaska can dish out in the bush, away from our major cities.

There is no simple answer to these problems, although we do know we cannot bring the bush communities to Anchorage and we definitely cannot take Anchorage to the bush. Each village, community or city in bush Alaska has its own lifestyle, and most of the residents want those lifestyles to remain intact. However, it has been shown that the quality of their living conditions needs to be improved and can be without infringing on their quality of life. So many of the things we take for granted in Anchorage and other

major Alaska cities are considered to be a luxury in the majority of these communities. It is not due to the lack of wanting to improve, but for the lack of available funds to make available these necessities. Living in Anchorage I enjoy a basketball game in the Arena, an exhibit at the convention center, or a paved road to take a Sunday drive. However, from what I have experienced in the bush I would trade any of these things for safe

drinking water running out of a tap, an inside toilet that flushes, or even a health center in case I'm sick or hurt.

Granted, Alaska has come a long way since I first worked in the bush 6 years ago. Many programs and projects, good and bad, have passed over this portion of our beautiful state. However, we still are not providing the necessary life supporting functions that we should for ALL the residents of this great State.

Therefore, I plead with you and all other governmental agencies to continue and provide the needed funding to bring up the basic standard of living that all Alaskans deserve.

Please reconsider your proposed budget, and provide the

necessary funding, through Capital Projects, that will enable all Alaskans to share in and benefit from the wealth this State and Country has to offer.

Sincerely,
Richard Berg, Owner
ABBESSCO