

# Reactions are mixed to Public Forums

BY MARGIE BAUMAN

In 1977, Alaska's government went to the residents again to ask their stand on a number of issues facing the state, ranging from land use to the permanent fund and state spending policies.

Reactions to that series of public forums were mixed, with some applauding a job well done and others critical of the intent and effect.

"I felt it was a good media forum to discuss the issues and that we did get the necessary information to the remote regions," said Herb Smelcer, Ahtna's land manager and former member of the Alaska Growth Policy Council.

"The information that we received was directly from the people and it was analyzed well," he said.

Smelcer, who represents the Ahtna region on the board of the Alaska Federation of Natives, said he felt that on the whole, the Alaska Public Forum drew a good response in his region. The response was much better in the first year of the forum, 1976, when Gov. Jay

Hammond came himself to listen to Ahtna's people. "The second year, he didn't come and the response wasn't as good," Smelcer said. "But it was a good program and the governor was sincere. A lot of people played it up as a political move. I suppose if people want to criticize, they can, but I felt it did a real necessary job," he said.

Bobby Schaeffer, chairman of the board of Mauneluk Association Inc., the regional social services organization for Northwest Alaska, took a somewhat opposite view of the public forum.

"It can be a good deal if worked properly, but what happened at least with the forum last year was that they had an outline forced down peoples throats," Schaeffer said. "The presentations were very short and public opinion on each issue was too minimal. There was very little room for productive dialogue.

"It should be a lot less political," Schaeffer said. "I went to a number of sessions during the first forum. There was no one actually quoting the important dialogue that came out of

the group sessions. You were limited to so much time per particular subject, so there was just one person's biased view and hearsay and that is not enough," he said.

As for the results, Schaeffer said "just take a look at what's happening in the legislature, coupled with the governor's budget and you will come up with zero effectiveness."

Schaeffer said questions on forum issues should be drafted by local leaders, who know how the people react to various questions about state government and its various functions. "Rather than questions like 'how would you spend \$500 million?', questions should be directed toward what people know about a particular subject. If they don't know a particular subject, have someone there to explain it and to direct questions toward that subject," he said.

As an example, Schaeffer cited questions on the permanent fund asked at the first public forum. People offered possible options to broad, abstract questions without knowing what the legal limitations were, he said.

## Year End Report

What the Alaska Public Forum and Alaska Growth Policy Council did do is to produce a year end report on the 1977 forums, noting reaction to the forums and recommendations of the growth policy group as a result of the forums.

The Alaska Growth Policy Council made recommendations in three areas discussed by the forum:

## Subsistence

Subsistence—the growth policy council supported the concept of a stronger regional participation and regulatory authority in management of fish and wildlife.

"We recommend that regulatory authority for these resources be vested in regional councils, rather than residing with the boards of fisheries and game," the council said in part. "However for the purpose of sound conservation practices and broad public interest, veto powers, arbitration and coordination

responsibility should reside with some statewide oversight authority."

The council said in promulgating responsibilities of the regional councils, consideration should be given to the nature of the resources involved.

The council also said that in order to involve more rural Alaskans in management of fish and wildlife, two steps should be taken:

1. The University of Alaska in conjunction with the state and community colleges, should explore and possibly develop a formal statewide para-professional fish and wildlife management, academic and intern program.

2. The State Department of Fish and Game should try to expand staff to accommodate para-professionals and provide on the job training for rural Alaskans in fish and wildlife management.

The council also suggested that the state try to communicate better with rural Alaskans, by rewriting fish and game regulations in language most people can understand, rather than in its present forum. They proposed translating regulations pertinent to the region into Yupik as a pilot project and, if successful, translating the regulations into other Native languages and dialects.

## The Permanent Fund

The growth policy council

recommended that contributions to the state's Permanent Fund be increased above the 25 percent level, "to a maximum consistent with the maintenance of current levels of government services." The council felt the increased contributions would help insure long term benefits from Alaska's mineral wealth through earnings of the permanent fund and also by having a braking effect on growth of government expenditures.

## The Billion Dollar Enterprise

The growth policy council recommended that the state move toward paying for government operations with monies coming from relatively permanent revenues, without any severe disruption in government service.

"The dependence for on-going government expenditures on oil and gas revenues should be decreased," the council said.

Finally, the council said that the governor should prepare an analysis of the long term (20 year) fiscal health of the government: what money can be expected as revenue and what will operations cost. "Each year, the governor should determine spending ceilings for operating and capital expenditures. Both the fiscal analysis and the rationale for the ceiling amounts selected should be presented to the people of Alaska and the legislature," the council said.