



Emotion rules in the Capitol

Emotion was ruling in Juneau at press time Friday, and the State House remained unable to muster the votes to pass a constitutional amendment for subsistence.

Action stalled when the amendment failed for a second time in the House Tuesday on a 23-17 vote, and legislators decided to take a three-day recess for the Fourth of July. They were scheduled to get back to work in the Capitol Saturday.

While we can only hope that common sense began to reign over the weekend, it doesn't appear that the Republican Minority in the House is going to budge. This is a group of people who even refused to meet with Congressman Don Young, a member of their own party, because he favors an amendment instead of the chaos we have now.

We're not going to spend a lot of time writing about what the people opposed to protecting subsistence are doing. Other newspapers throughout Alaska have been pointing fingers very effectively, but there comes a time when it's useless to continue to bewail their stiff-necked obstinence.

We'd just like to point out that it's really hard to understand how people can oppose a broad-based constitutional amendment which is permissive in nature. In fact, if the voters approved the amendment in November — and polls indicate this is precisely what would happen — the amendment would not mandate that the constitution do anything. It would merely authorize the Legislature to pass laws to protect subsistence.

So what we have now is a situation where the Alaska Supreme Court which has declared Alaska's law giving priority to rural subsistence users in time of shortage unconstitutional, with the federal government assuming control of fish and game management on the 60 percent of Alaska owned by the federal government as of July 1.

The Alaska Legislature refused during regular session to tackle this issue, so now legislators find themselves in special session, deadlocked over the constitutional amendment that could solve the problem and regain state control of fish and game management in Alaska.

We hope to be writing a different editorial next week. It's possible that the cooling off period has given people a chance to come to their senses. If not, we believe that more action, such as that taken by Ahtna Inc. to close Native lands to non-shareholders will be the norm rather than the exception.