

Some harmony

Reprinted from The Tanana Chief's Council

The word "harmony" seems to be on the minds and lips of nearly everyone in Juneau — including the governor, senators and representatives — as the 1984 Legislature convenes.

It is a welcome sign after the bickering, divisiveness and strife that marked last year's session. Even House Speaker Joe Hayes, who leads a majority coalition of House Republicans, promised a smoother session. Members of his coalition caused the most serious confrontation of the '83 Legislature. They boycotted a joint House-Senate meeting to confirm Gov. Bill Sheffield's appointments to his cabinet, the Board of Fisheries and other jobs. State Troopers were dispatched to bring in enough House members to establish a quorum.

The disunity worked against rural Alaskans. Important nominees to the Board of Fisheries were rejected because of sectional bitterness. The loss left Yukon without representation.

But rural Alaskans have good reason to be optimistic. Legislators have laid out a list of priorities that include important rural issues. A Dittman Research poll commissioned by Hayes showed that people all over Alaska favor state funding of local water and sewer projects, local and minority hire laws, and increased alcohol and drug problem funding. Care for senior citizens in the homes, longevity bonuses and Permanent Fund dividends also appeared near the top of the list of favored issues.

And Gov. Sheffield has made key personnel changes that should make his cabinet and staff sensitive to rural concerns. John Shively, formerly of the NANA regional corporation, has become the governor's chief of staff, and former Doyon President Emil Notti is the new community and regional affairs commissioner.

The governor has made commitments to increasing Native hire in state government and to shifting more of the state's resources to low-income and unemployed Alaskans.

Many of those state dollars are needed to improve conditions in Interior villages. Money would be well-spent on alternative energy and weatherization projects and on methods to improve water quality in placer mining streams. The village public safety officer program should be expanded, and education is a continuing concern. Local participation as well as state dollars are needed in those areas. Improved health and sanitation services and health aide training programs are needed in the villages.

Unless all citizens and branches of government put aside the sectional squabbles that marked the '83 Legislature, harmony will be a hollow promise. Legislators must work for the best advantages for the people at home who elected them, but they must also remember that the public good is best served through compromise and cooperation.

The last legislative session was one of the worst in state history. Let's hope that this year the delegates will work harmoniously toward Alaskans' common good.

