

Brenda and Frank Vying for Election

The lone State House seat in District 19 is still very much up for grabs. Brenda Itta of Barrow beat the incumbent, Frank Ferguson, of Kotzebue in the August 22 primary election by a

very narrow margin.

Itta, as the Democratic candidate, is the only name to appear on the ballot, but Ferguson is running a strong write-in campaign, as an independent.

Brenda decided to run after working for the State Legislature last session. When she returned home, people were asking if she would run. "I don't like to turn down requests from my own people," said Brenda. If she wins, she will be the first Eskimo woman to be elected.

Ferguson has a good record for his two year term. Working

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BRENDA ITTA

Brenda and Frank Vie..

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with Martin Moore, Chuck Degnan, and other bush representatives, he helped spearhead a drive for 19 million dollars for bush high schools.

Fighting opposition which said you shouldn't be putting million dollar facilities in villages, Frank maintains "We've got to stop looking at regional high schools."

Brenda also said one of the first things she will try to do if elected is to improve educational facilities.

"The state government has really lagged in this area. We are citizens of Alaska too, but our facilities are next to nothing as far as high schools are concerned. The curriculum does not meet a great part of the children's needs."

"One of the first things I tried to stress on the floor of the house," said Ferguson, "was bi-lingual education." To the charge that Eskimo is a dying language, Frank asked, "Would the legislators fight for the English language if it was going to die out?"

"We're going to come to a point where we have court hearings, etc., in the Eskimo languages."

Ferguson called attention to the fact that his district has no court building. "Every other district has a court facility," he pointed out.

Lack of good public facilities is a concern of candidate Itta as well. "Right now," she said, "the villages are very unhappy because they are getting portable classrooms and trailers for the school teachers. I really feel it's a crime to get classrooms that are already third-rate. This

is one issue I'm working hard on communicating with the State Commissioner of Education and the SOS Board."

She also cited the need for homes for the elderly within the district. "Some of our elderly are sent away from their environment in their last years. They are sent to homes in Fairbanks or Anchorage and I've seen them where they've suffered needlessly. If we had facilities in our own area, they'd be well taken care of by our own people."

"The same thing happens with hospital facilities. In Barrow, for instance," Brenda said, "they are very inadequate, as is the size of the staff."

Ferguson would fight to get statewide health standards set for Native foods. He sees the state as still leaning heavily on federal monies for needed projects, such as a satellite communication system. "I think the state should put up a satellite," said Ferguson.

Air service is a major concern in District 19. Traveling is an expensive proposition and both candidates have seen the problem of communication with the villages as they attempted to campaign in the far-flung reaches of the district.

Kotzebue is anything but happy about the recent CAB ruling on the Nome-Kotzebue air routes, said Ferguson. "Although I didn't want to see this happen," he said, "I'm glad it happened now. Because it's an election year, there can be enough pressure to get it aired and have the date postponed."

As for expanding tourism, Frank said, "The people who make money on tourism are the airlines with the tour package. They (CAB) want to see the airlines make a profit. This is fine, but are the people being served?"

Asked what differences divide the two candidates, Brenda Itta answered, "There are not really very many that divide us. Frank is a good friend of mine. Since District 19 is so large, some people think that we could have a senator from Kotzebue (Willie Hensley) and a representative from Barrow."

The choice may indeed be between two cities rather than two candidates. Brenda said philosophically, "My thinking is: we're giving our people a very good choice of candidates, something they haven't had for a long time. "I'm glad for that."