

Capitol Undercurrents

Doggone it!—During the special session to resolve subsistence, Republican leaders did find enough time to call a joint session to override two vetoes by the governor. One provides that Alaska law enforcement officers must do background checks and affiliated paperwork required under federal law that allows machine guns to be transferred from one owner to another. The other changes a voter-passed initiative and dramatically eases airborne wolf control. During the wolf control debate, Rep. Carl Morgan noted that in his district a pack of wolves attacked and ate an eight-dog team. He concluded: "When they eat Fluffy, there's something wrong!" He got the biggest laugh of the joint session.

Ouch, that really hurts—At a point during the special session when Republican Rep. Scott Ogan, the self-proclaimed "helmsman" of the House Resources Committee, was being particularly obstreperous about a solution to the subsistence issue, The Anchorage Daily News weighed in with an editorial. The Daily News noted when the waters became waves and the wind

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Alaska loses legacy gained at statehood

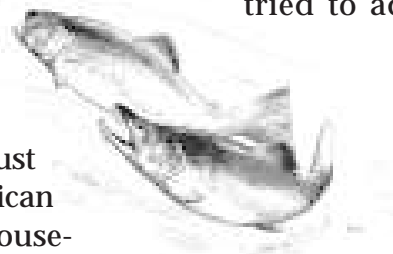
Several days into the special session, Gov. Tony Knowles told a small group of legislators we wouldn't get a subsistence constitutional amendment unless some legislators were willing to earn a Purple Heart.

The Purple Hearts were earned in the state House. The 40 representatives got to the magical super majority needed to put a clean subsistence amendment on the year 2000 general election ballot for Alaska voters to approve, or disapprove. By doing the right thing—allowing Alaska voters the final say on subsistence—Speaker Brian Porter bled all over the House floor. His Purple Heart was earned because he had to amputate four votes from his Republican majority. Some rural Democrats earned their Purple Hearts by taking fire from significant components of their constituencies when they voted for an amendment that didn't use the word 'rural'.

A bi-partisan super majority in the House sent to the Senate an amendment as carefully crafted as a prayer. It had the tone and language that worked for 28 of the 40 House members. Unfortunately, when they gave that well-written 'prayer' to the Senate, half the Senate Republicans so many dirty words to it that the House Republicans and Democrats finally just walked away from it.

At one point late Thursday, just before adjournment, some Republican senators had taken the simple House-passed amendment and tacked on two other amendments to the constitution. The additional changes to the constitution: 1) provided the legislature could sue the federal government; and 2) changed the way the constitution could be revised.

The subsistence constitutional amendment passed by House Republicans and Democrats was growing like Topsy behind the closed doors of the Senate Republican caucus. In alarm, the House adjourned out from under the Senate—in effect telling



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blew the helmsman grew seasick and went below decks to avoid what needed to be done re: subsistence

A rose is a rose is a rose—The four who bolted from the House majority said they were forming their own “rump caucus”. One enterprising denizen of the Capitol checked his American College Dictionary and noted that “rump caucus” could be defined as “the last and unimportant or inferior part” of the “members of a legislative body who belongs to the same party”. That anonymous practitioner of lexicology also quoted Oliver Cromwell’s speech to the Rump Parliament of 1653 on posters tacked up around the capital. Cromwell said to rump parliamentarians: “you have sat too long here for any good you have been doing lately. . .depart, I say; and let us have done with you. In the name of God, go!”

The king has no clothes—One of the up-north Senate opponents of a constitutional amendment on subsistence was being “sat on” by a campaign supporter trying to keep the senator from changing his vote. Capitol wits said they couldn’t understand why the senator was listening to the “bad suit”, a small contributor who is both cheap and loud. On the other hand, shouldn’t legislators listen even to people who don’t pony up a lot of dough?

CONTACT US

Senator_Kim_Elton@legis.state.ak.us

Dianne_Lindback@legis.state.ak.us

Phone (907) 465-4947 FAX (907) 465-2108

Legacy lost *(cont'd)*

Senate Republicans to quit playing games and either pass the version the House bled over, or go home. It was a telling moment. The House Republican majority gave up on the Senate Republican majority.

I was proud of the bi-partisan unity in the House, the work by the governor’s office, and the flexibility of rural Alaskans. Despite charges from the hardcore subsistence opposition that rural Alaskans wouldn’t budge, they actually gave a lot in the compromise version passed by the House. They even signaled their willingness to give more to get the amendment out of the Senate.

In the House constitutional amendment, they gave up the word “rural” and allowed it to be substituted with “place of residence”. They also gave up on the word “shall” and reluctantly okayed the word “may”—as in the state “may” provide a priority based on place of residence.

In the Senate, operating on the old adage that a spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down, rural Alaskans also agreed to language that provided the constitutional amendment, if approved by voters, wouldn’t go into effect until a court challenge to federal law could be accomplished.

But all those sweeteners weren’t enough to persuade even one of the obstreperous Senate Republicans to join the seven GOPers and five Democrats in the Senate who wanted to allow Alaskans the opportunity to vote on a subsistence change to the constitution in the next general election. Some subsistence amendment opponents objected to letting Alaskans vote because “they didn’t understand the situation” (one even said we shouldn’t govern by “mob rule”).

Sooooo, failure. The feds took over fish management on federal lands October 1st. They have the ability to extend jurisdiction off federal lands for migratory populations like salmon. Management for subsistence is vested in the Alaska heads of the Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, BIA and Park Service. They have the ability to now cut commercial, sport and personal use harvests of fish to preserve subsistence opportunities. One of the most important legacies given us by the pioneers who fought for statehood in the ‘50s is gone.

Perhaps we ought to name some of the federal office buildings in Alaska for the eight state senators who killed any opportunity to take a subsistence amendment to the people of Alaska. Wouldn’t it be ironic if we named the Ketchikan Forest Service office building after one of the Forest Service’s biggest bashers? How does it sound: the Sen. Robin Taylor Forest Service Complex? It could be a one-stop-shopping center for the logging industry and, now, for Alaska’s commercial fishermen, sport fishermen and hunters.