

Bush Caucus Report

Twenty-First Legislature

February 14, 2000



To the AFN Board of Directors:

We appreciate the opportunity to report on the 2000 Legislative Session. As you might expect, budget issues dominate the session, and much of the Bush Caucus' focus is on the bottom line for rural Alaska. We've spotlighted a few of the issues in this flyer, and we encourage you to call us any time-use our 800 numbers, or call collect.

As we all know, population shifts and reapportionment have taken a toll on representation for Bush Alaska in the Legislature. Although we're small in numbers, we come from good stock so we're tough! We also know how important it is to pool our resources and so we may be calling on you from time to time to support or oppose a particular bill or budget proposal. Your help is always appreciated.

Revenue Sharing and Municipal Assistance

The Governor's budget supports stable funding for municipal assistance and revenue sharing, but word in the halls of the capitol is to expect a minimum of a 10% cut.

Any cut, on top of the one-third cut last year, will hurt our small communities even more. We need to send a strong message to legislative leaders about the damage further cuts will do to small communities.

On our home fronts, organizations have got to be working together to see where resources can be pooled or responsibilities combined.

School Construction & Maintenance

We're cautiously optimistic something will happen for some of our rural schools' construction and maintenance needs this year. Two bond proposals have been introduced, one by the Governor and one by House Finance. The approaches are different and it's too early to predict where legislative support will actually come. The good news is that people are working on the issue. This is one of the top priorities of the Bush Caucus.

Power Cost Equalization

Funding for PCE is one of our biggest challenges. Our goal is to identify a long term funding source. There have been hearings on energy issues, including PCE, but no viable plan has yet emerged.

The administration says it is working on a long range plan, and we've got the attention of some members of the majority. Be on the lookout for any developments on PCE.

VPSO Funding

The Governor's budget included a salary increase for VPSO's in response to the tremendous effort by AFN to address the problem. The Finance Committees, however, are working off budget figures from last year. We need help getting the message out in support of our VPSO's.

On a related issue, we need to continue to watch for any effort to reduce administrative overhead for VPSO programs.

Transportation Funding

The Governor has also introduced a bond package that would address some of the transportation needs in the state, including \$30 million for rural Alaska.

The package is funded with general obligation bonds and would require a vote in the 2000 election.

Water & Sewer Funding



Reps Morgan, Joule and Kapsner, Senators Lincoln and Adams listen to ANHB discussion of issues.

The Alaska Native Health Board met in Juneau last week. Before leaving town, they took time to address members of the Bush Caucus. Although it now appears not all villages will be able to retire their honey buckets by the well-publicized goal of 2005, we are making progress.

With the influx of federal dollars and the continuation of state support more of our rural communities are becoming healthier places to live and raise families.



ANHB members before the Bush Caucus in Juneau.