

Rep. Charlie Parr seeks re-election to Alaska legislature

Public education, tax reform, OCS impact, freedom of information and agricultural development are a few of the key issues he will continue to address if the voters return him to office next year, Rep. Charlie Parr said recently after he filed for re-election to his seat in the Alaska Legislature.

Parr, a Democrat, was the only freshman House member from Fairbanks to chair a major standing committee in the Ninth Legislature, the House Select Committee on Education. If re-elected, he said, "my prospects for again securing committee assignments are excellent."

As chairman of the Education Committee, Rep. Parr played a leadership role in shaping

legislation affecting the University of Alaska, the state's public school system, and other top priority matters, such as the disposition of Alaska Methodist University and the controversial college tuition grant program.

As a member of the influential House Judiciary Committee, he also had a large part in drafting medical malpractice legislation.

A strong believer in freedom of public information, Rep. Parr says that of all of his legislative accomplishments, he's proudest of the bill he introduced on that subject which is currently in the final stages of consideration in the Senate.

"The bill attempts to balance the citizen's right to know against the right of privacy guaranteed in the Alaska

constitution," Parr said. "We haven't done it before, and in this post-Watergate era, with its revelations of wholesale invasions of citizen privacy, it seems high time that we do."

Parr sees responsiveness as a key element for a good legislator. "While I can't always agree with everybody," he said, "I can listen to and try to understand their views before making up my mind. And while I can't always guarantee results," he added, "I recognize an overriding obligation to follow up on the problems my constituents bring to me."

While social and economic impact from Outer Continental Shelf oil and gas development is not an issue of immediate concern to Interior Alaska residents, Parr said, it's one

which carries major implications for the state as a whole.

The cost to the state and affected communities of projected OCS impact stemming from the nine lease sales proposed by the federal government off Alaska's shores, is expected to be greater than the costs of impact from the trans-Alaska oil pipeline, he pointed out. Although the bill on OCS impact he authored this year didn't pass, Parr said, the need for legislation like it will become more obvious as OCS development proceeds off Alaska's coastline in the coming months and years.

One of his continuing concerns centers on the need to encourage the development of agricultural lands and activities in Alaska in advance of predicted world-wide food shortages, Parr said.

He has sponsored, and will continue to push, legislation which would require the state to make state lands available for agricultural purposes.

"One of the major deterrents to the production of homegrown foodstuffs as I see it," Parr said, "is the state's failure to release and earmark land for farming in Alaska despite the existence of hundreds of thousands of acres of arable soil here."

Also high on his list of policy priorities is tax relief for the state's overburdened property owners in organized boroughs who pay most of the local cost of schools and education in Alaska.

Legislation must be enacted which spreads the school tax burden to major property owners in the unorganized borough of the state who now pay little or no school taxes.

Parr said.

Finally, he said, state government's mushrooming bureaucracy must be curbed and decentralized in order to bring more efficiency to government operations and to adapt them more closely to local needs.

"Under a highly centralized state government like ours," Parr explained, "there's a tendency to increase the number of chiefs as opposed to the number of indians, and I believe decentralization of state government would help to offset that trend."

Asked why he would like to be re-elected to the state legislature, Parr replied: "The success I've enjoyed these past two years in influencing the course of legislation to the advantage of my constituents and the state indicates to me that I'm an effective lawmaker. That gives me a great deal of personal satisfaction, and a sense of fulfillment."

Rep. Parr is a retired Army officer and a former University of Alaska faculty member. He and his wife Karen live on Chena Hot Springs Road, in a house which she designed and which, he says, "has lots of our own elbow grease on it."