

Knowles says he'd continue service level in rural Alaska

by Geoff Kennedy
for the Tundra Times

Editor's note: This is the first in a series of articles the Tundra Times will be running on candidates for governor and lieutenant governor.

Democratic gubernatorial candidate Tony Knowles promises to keep services to rural Alaska at their same levels, despite declines in state revenues.

Knowles says he trimmed the budget by 10 percent during his two terms as Anchorage mayor from 1982 through 1987. He says that process took

several years of not replacing employees as they quit or retired. That gradual process of attrition, he says, enabled him to maintain services despite dwindling revenues.

Knowles says he'd continue that process as governor but he wouldn't speculate on how much he plans to trim the state budget.

In fact, he says he expects to have money to continue state services because of the expanding state economy and because of continued federal programs available to the state.

Knowles steered clear of specifics

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• Knowles says he would cut spending

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and stressed general principles. He says the way to bring jobs to rural Alaska is through a public-private partnership. He pointed to the state loan to start the Red Dog Mine in Northwest Alaska as an example.

Knowles said he'd encourage on-shore processing, developing fish hatcheries, environmentally-sound mining and tourism in rural Alaska.

Tourism, he says, "has a special meaning to rural Alaska," because people can get paid for communicating the "personal and spiritual meaning" of their culture. That process, he says, would at the same time reinforce the unique qualities of rural Alaska cultures.

As governor, he says, he'd work to protect those cultures by supporting a state law to preserve a subsistence priority for rural Alaskans. Knowles supports the Alaska Federation of Natives' position in favor of a constitutional amendment to grant a subsistence priority to rural residents.

"Subsistence is an important value that is more than a way of life," he says. "It is a life to many Alaskans. All Alaskans have to protect and support that."

Knowles says, as governor, he would find a way to pay for repairing Northwest Alaska sewer and water systems. Those systems froze again during a prolonged cold snap this winter. The state so far has not provided funding from the Division of Emergency Services. Last year the state spent millions of dollars for repairs for sewer and water systems in Northwest Alaska. Knowles says he would hope to expand village safe



Tony Knowles has spent 15 years in public service in Anchorage.

water programs.

Knowles says village residents deserve adequate sewer, water and electric power services. He says he'd fight to keep Power Cost Equalization subsidies to rural Alaska at the same levels.

Knowles says he'd preserve the Rural Alaska Television Network despite claims by critics that the state should get out of the television business. Knowles calls television an important tool in education. But he says it isn't the governor's job to decide which television programs would be broadcast. He jokes he doesn't even have a say about which channels get turned on in his own home.

Knowles says the state should ex-

pand its role in providing pre-natal care, early childhood and adolescent education, teaching parent skills, clean water and solid waste disposal.

He says he doesn't plan to cut out any state services, but he says he'd determine which services can be provided more efficiently at the local level.

Faced with extreme budget shortfalls, Knowles says, his first priority would be to reduce state spending. Next, he would work to build a local tax base for communities as state aid to local governments would be phased out. At the same time, he would require industries to pay for the agencies that regulate them, for example, the Departments of Fish and Game, Natural Resources and Environmen-

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tal Conservation.

His third priority would be a state income tax. That way, he says, non-residents would have to pay for some of the service they get.

"Our quality of life is the issue. My job is to work shoulder to shoulder with Alaskans to make that happen," he said.

Knowles has spent 15 years in public service as Anchorage mayor and on the Anchorage Assembly, as well as on the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council.

He owns part of two Anchorage restaurants. Knowles is married and has three children. He's lived in Alaska since 1968, the year he graduated from Yale University. He's 47 years old.

photo by Chris Cushman