

LEGISLATIVE ATTITUDES HIT

Alaska Bush Problems Not Getting Attention Claims Chuck Degnan

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JUNEAU — State Rep. Chuck Degnan, D-Unalakleet, charges that unless the leadership of the Alaska House and Senate undergo a change of attitude rural committees will get nothing significant out of the legislature this year.

In a statement issued from his legislative office Thursday, (Feb. 28) Degnan voiced criticism of colleagues whom he feels are unsympathetic to the problems of rural Alaska.

"I feel generally that this legislature is unique only in the sense of its seeming appetite for obscurity and rhetoric and what is an apparent desire to run out the clock in the legislature, leaving many pressing issues behind without any legislative action," Degnan said. "It seems that the main goal of the House leadership is to adjourn in 75 to 90 days.

"In my opinion, the leadership of the House and Senate reflects a subconscious anti-rural attitude, with the general feeling that Alaska ends at the city limits of Fairbanks and Anchorage," he said.

The Unalakleet Democrat said that unfortunately for rural communities, little interim legislative committee work was oriented toward their needs.

"The monetary committee had not one rural member and it considered only the problems of bankers," he said.

"This is strange at a time when Native corporations will be able to draw on millions of dollars; at a time when a unique Native bank has been proposed, and at a time when one considers the people of the rural areas as the most pressed consumers in the state for services.

"Instead, that committee, out of its vest pocket, simply germinated a bill to give limited service and draw out Native corporation deposits because of their "in" position in a community," he said.

"At this pace and with the priorities set, I do not believe that the majority of the rural communities throughout Alaska will get anything significant out of this legislature unless the leadership has a change of mind," Degnan said.

His comments came in the aftermath of a hearing earlier in the week in which the House Finance discussed House Bill 157. The measure, originally sponsored by Degnan and now also in a committee substitute

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form, would apply a cost-of-living factor to the state aid to local government state. "If enacted, it would set a precedent for Congress to follow," Degnan said.

"Last year, before a joint session of the legislature, U.S. Sen. Ted Stevens supported the concept of cost-of-living differentials. I hope that this legislature will enact this concept into law," he said.