

Alaska politics and parallels: State Senate has obstructed progress

In this upcoming election where we will be voting for officials on both the national and state levels, it's important to discern the parallels between them. Barack Obama has pushed for government to play an extreme role in our society. His push for higher taxes coupled with increased government spending has decimated the national economy. His administration's anti-development approach to our natural resources has cost us an untold number of jobs; especially in Alaska. Obamacare is a combination of huge taxation and government regulation like we've never seen before. Many companies have already started cutting back their labor force to accommodate it.

The U.S. Senate, controlled by the Democrats, hasn't passed a budget in over three years. They just keep increasing spending, while complaining about how they're being stopped from raising taxes so that they can spend more. The House has done their duty and passed a number of budgets, all rejected by the Senate because they didn't increase spending enough. The House has passed a number of bills to allow resource development, repeal Obamacare and bring us closer to energy independence; again all rejected by the Senate.

Our own state Senate, controlled by the Democrat-run coalition, has also spent most of its time rejecting good legislation. A coastal zone management bill was originally passed by the House with a true bipartisan vote of 40-0. It was then sent over to the Senate, where the radical environmentalists who lead the coalition rewrote it as a massive anti-development bill, which in the end the voters had to kill at the polls. While some of the Interior senators in the coalition originally voted for the gas line bill a few years back, this last year they voted down moving it forward, delaying a gas line to Fairbanks one more year. Another good example is oil tax reform: The House passed HB 110 and then the Senate held only a few minutes of committee hearings on it, and never brought in industry or experts to testify on it. The Senate wasted the entire session coming up with a different bill, at that point finally allowing some testimony, and then ended up with a result that it was not able to get consensus on within its own coalition, and so it failed in the Senate. The meat of that bill was then tacked on as an amendment to the 'middle earth' oil exploration tax credits bill that the House had sent over to the Senate. This was in the final days of the session, and the House, with no time left to evaluate it, had to put the tax credits in another bill, and remove the non-meaningful oil tax changes.

The real highlight here of how the coalition has operated is that they refuse to deal with the House and come up with compromises. They have just obstructed, stopping any bill that would have moved this state forward. The coalition also hasn't been a big help for Fairbanks, with all the major leadership roles taken by senators from the south of the state. They killed the storage tax credits that Fairbanks needed to get natural gas here, and those were only saved by hard work in the House by Rep. Steve Thompson, who at the last minute attached it to a bill the leadership of the coalition desperately wanted to pass (same bill they had to put the exploration credits into). Those storage tax credits already have Fairbanks Natural Gas building a large storage tank, and will be probably be used by Golden Valley Electric Association if it moves ahead with a project.

We have a great opportunity this year to stop the progressive agenda that has dominated our state for the past four years and has been strangling the dreams and economy of the Interior. We can choose principled conservatives at the polls who understand the need for resource development, jobs, energy and most importantly, the need for a united Interior delegation. Please vote on Tuesday and send the clear message to the rest of the state that the Interior is united and pro-business.