

Senator Stevens Still Optimistic About Coalition's Survival

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

Last week's primary election held limited interest for many folks in Kodiak, with no contested legislative races here, but there was one resident who watched closely. Kodiak's Gary Stevens, who heads the coalition majority in the state senate, said there were some surprises for members of the Bi-Partisan Working Group, when two of its Republican members were defeated in the primary.

-- (Stevens 1 22 sec "That was a pretty interesting development. Micciche won against Wagoner and Linda Minard lost her race as well. You know it doesn't really change the balance between the parties -- it keeps that the same. A primary is important, interesting, but frankly it doesn't tell you much about what will happen in the general election, that's the key.")

The coalition has come under fire from Governor Sean Parnell and others who say it's not conservative enough and doesn't go along with plans such as giving oil companies billions of dollars of tax breaks. But Stevens doesn't necessarily think intra-party politics led to the defeats of Wagoner and Minnard:

-- (Stevens 2 13 sec "I think it's too simplistic to say that it was simply an election, the primary, had to do with anti-coalition folks. Will there be a coalition again, or not be a coalition. I don't have any crystal ball on that. We'll just see how things turn out.")

In a race in Fairbanks, former commissioner of the State Department of Labor, Click Bishop, won handily over former Senator Ralph Seekins and another Republican. Bishop, unlike his competitors -- and many Republicans around the state -- did not sign a loyalty oath vowing to stay out of the bi-partisan majority. That could play a significant role in the coalition's future, and Stevens seemed pleased that Bishop won:

-- (Stevens 3 20

sec “He was a tremendous labor commissioner. You know when you talk to him where his heart is. He’s into job training and improving employment for the state of Alaska, for people. He did a fine job as commissioner of Labor and I think he’ll be a great senator for Fairbanks as well.”)

As for the anti bipartisanship oaths, Stevens says those who sign it might be setting themselves up for failure later:

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(Stevens 4 25 sec “That’s a little bit dangerous, you know. As an elected senator you want to represent your district and you want to be there in a position to do some good for your district. So I think it’s a little short-sighted of folks who say they will not join a coalition because they don’t know what the balance is going to be. If it were 10-10 or even 11-9 again, there could very easily be a coalition legislature and it’s not really in the best interest of your constituents if you find yourself in the minority.”)

Stevens
has been president of the Senate Bi-Partisan Working Group for the past four years, and served as majority leader and rules chair under former senator Lyda Green after the coalition was formed in 2006. He said he would lead the Senate majority again if his peers asked him to.

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