Austerman Prepares Return to Juneau

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

Kodiak's Alan Austerman will be heading back to Juneau in a couple weeks, and will be treading on familiar ground. The life-long Kodiak resident will be returning to the Alaska Legislature, where he once served as a state representative and state senator. He also spent four years in the capital as Governor Frank Murkowski's fisheries advisor. He won election again to the house this fall, after six years out of office.

Austerman was a guest on KMXT's Talk of the Rock on Tuesday, and fielded a whole range of questions about going back to Juneau and what he expects to be the issues at hand when the 26th Alaska Legislature is gaveled into order.

Having served in both the House and then the Senate, Austerman said there are distinct differences between the two, and he prefers being a representative over a senator:

-- (Austerman 1 40 sec "My two years in the Senate ... really good in the house.")

With his experience as fish advisor, Austerman says he will work to make sure the rest of the legislature is aware of how important commercial fishing is to the state:

-- (Austerman 2 44 sec "The four years that ... Kodiak and coastal communities.")

He said the legislature needs to get involved in setting policy on issues such as

rationalization, which is creeping its way into effect bit by bit:

-- (Austerman 3 29 sec "If you're going to stop ... and I think it's wrong.")

Being a rural legislator, Austerman said he has never supported moving the state's capital to a more urban area, and disagrees with Governor Palin's moving department heads to Anchorage:

-- (Austerman 4 25 sec "I think the governor ... to make the world go around.")

The governor announced her proposed budget several weeks ago. Austerman said he thinks she pegged the price of oil too high for the upcoming year. Because of the state's reliance on the price of oil, he would like to see the state somehow diversify its revenue.

Putting together the capital and operating budget might be harder than in the recent past, since the price of oil has fallen by about 75 percent since the summer. But, Austerman says the last legislature put some money aside, and that should help:

-- (Austerman 5 29 sec "It's going to be easier ... expecting some really hard times.")

Austerman says he's aware of the capital projects needed in his district, but isn't sure how much the state can help the city of Kodiak build its new jail or the borough build a new high school. He says road improvements are needed here on the island and many villages would like new docks, boat harbors, airports and schools as well. He says that while he'll work for the projects, he can't make any promises.

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