

Fairbanks News Miner

Don Young fundraiser in Mat-Su

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From Washington D.C. correspondent R.A. Dillon:

PALMER – About 50 Mat-Su Valley residents attended a meet-and-greet and fundraiser Friday night for Don Young, who's seeking his 18th term in the U.S. House of Representatives.

The family-style barbeque was hosted by Young's daughter Dawn Vallely at her home off the Parks Highway overlooking the Knik River Valley and Chugach Mountains.

Vallely said she hosted the event to introduce her father to a new generation of voters, especially soccer moms like herself.

"There's this huge crowd of people who don't know him," she said. "The only information they have about my dad is from the media and as a consequence they don't think he's a very nice man. I really want these people to get to know him and say, 'hey he's not the devil they're making him out to be.'"

Young is facing the toughest race of his 35-year congressional career, in part because of a federal investigation into his campaign finances and ties to lobbyists. Young has not been charged with a crime and has said he expects to be exonerated.

The allegations and his famously gruff personality have none the less tarnished his reputation among his fellow GOP colleagues in the state. Lt. Gov. Sean Parnell is challenging Young in the Republican primary Aug. 26.

Despite the importance of the race to Young's future political career, he was in high spirits in the company of his wife Lulu and two daughters. Young said he was happy to be home.

"I'd rather be here than Washington, D.C., anytime," he said.

Joni Nelson, Young's eldest daughter, came up from her home in Anchorage to help her sister set up for the meet-and-greet.

After 35 years in Congress, helping her father win reelection has become second nature for the sisters.

"I've been doing this all my life," she said. "Other kids went to summer camp; we went to campaign. During election years we'd go door-to-door and the other years we'd go to Fort Yukon."

Young spoke briefly about his family's dedication to the state and said the biggest challenge facing Alaska was the intrusion of the federal government into state affairs.

Among those in attendance Friday was Alice Massie, vice president of the Mat-Su Republican Women's Club. She said Young's reputation for being gruff is well deserved, but it's also served the state well.

"I know Don's a little rough around the edges," Massie said, "but we get one congressman and two senators in Washington, D.C., and they better be willing to speak up and be a little rough around the edges to serve the best interests of the state."

Steve Colligan, vice president of the state Republican Party, also attended the event. As a party official he said he was supporting both candidates in the primary.

"Don has done a lot of good things for Alaska," Colligan said. "I know Parnell, too, and he's a good guy."

"As for Don Young, I appreciate all that he has done for the state," Colligan said.

Young will head to his home in Fort Yukon on Aug. 24, two days before the primary election, for nine days. Lawmakers are set to resume work on Capitol Hill on Sept. 8.