

FAIRBANKS DAILY NEWS MINER:

Rep. Don Young opens Fairbanks campaign office

By Rena Delbridge

Published Sunday, July 20, 2008

FAIRBANKS — Alaska's lone U.S. House Representative spoke with conviction as he asked for continued backing from longtime supporters and family friends during a Fairbanks campaign office opening Saturday.

"Every year we have run, you've supported me, and we got elected," Rep. Don Young said, his wife, Lu, at his side. "This year is a tough year, and we all know that. We both believe if we weren't the best for the job, we would not be running. With the experience I have, with the connections I have, with the understanding I have, on both sides of the aisle, for this state, it crucially important."

Young was first elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1973, after serving in the state legislature for more than six years. Voters have repeatedly affirmed their support by returning him to office, but Young faces a greater challenge this year in his bid for a 19th term. Lt. Gov. Sean Parnell is expected to present a strong primary challenge for the Republican prize, while Democrat Ethan Berkowitz is amassing a sizable war chest in preparation for the general election this fall. Also in the race are Democrats Diane Benson and James Metcalf and Republican Gabrielle LeDoux.

Against the calls for change the challengers are making, Young said his experience and rank in the House are valuable to Alaskans who want to see action. He is the ranking member of the House Committee on Natural Resources and a member of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

Along with new challengers, Young is under investigation for his relationship to VECO. Two of the company's top executives were convicted of bribing state lawmakers. Young has not been charged with any wrongdoing.

Despite those troubles, Young said he remains committed to working hard for all Alaskans.

A day after he was sworn into office for the first time, he introduced the bill creating the trans-Alaska pipeline, which became law. Young said the pipeline helped build the state, and that he's been building ever since.

Now he is counting down the days to the election — pointedly not the 37 or so left until the Aug. 26 primary, but the 107 days until the general election. The optimism that he will earn the Republican seat going into the general election is shared by campaign spokesman Mike Anderson, who said Interior support will help realize that goal.

"The Interior is very important," Anderson said. "It's Mr. Young's home base. This is the heart of the state."

To develop support in the region, Young's local campaign office will be open from 3-6 p.m. weekdays, and staffed with volunteers.

Those include Jeremy Price, who has worked for Young in Washington.

Price grew up in Salcha, where his family is involved in construction businesses and has benefited directly from some of the earmarks Young secured.

"Being from the Interior, I wanted to make sure the Interior remembers who Don Young is and how he's helped us out," Price said.

The office does offer reminders of the earmarks that Young has secured.

On one wall inside, posters list just that — a series of earmarks and projects Young has been instrumental in securing for Alaska during 30-plus years in Washington, D.C.

"We want to let voters know what Mr. Young has brought to the fight through the years," Anderson said.