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## Lawmakers discuss energy issues with Fairbanks folks

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For decades, Rich Seifert has been intimately involved in Alaska energy issues.

He told legislators at a Wednesday evening hearing that their goal of developing a statewide energy policy was “both optimistic and terrifying.”

FAIRBANKS — Optimistic, because perhaps such a policy will bring significant changes to bear that could sustain Alaska’s communities.

Terrifying, because the state has been here before, many times.

The University of Alaska Fairbanks professor urged lawmakers to pull the plug on a long-standing tradition of funding

energy on a project-by-project basis, which he said is built on pork.

“It’s a really bad idea,” he said. “It’s never worked very well. ... We’ve got to do an energy policy that is not driven by that legacy. Otherwise, it is going to fail again.”

Rep. Charisse Millett,

R-Anchorage, chaired the hearing and said she’s pleased to see people engaging in the energy policy discussions.

“They are looking for leadership,” she noted. “That’s something both energy committees are going to provide.”

A number of people who testified presented their thoughts before a group of senators a few weeks ago in Fairbanks.

Jessie Peterson, local issues and energy coordinator for the Northern Alaska Environmental Center, was among them.

“Alaska will need, first, state leadership on an energy vision, which is what you’re doing here,” she said. “Thank you.”

Peterson, like many others, argued for a focus on conservation and greater efficiency while pursuing greater use of renewables.

The House and Senate Resources and Energy committees are touring the state this summer, listening to communities talk about how an energy policy must work for them. Input will be considered this fall, with energy policy legislation likely filed at the beginning of the next session in January.

The policy, Millett said, will serve as the state’s vision. She also anticipated a plan to realize the vision.

Gov. Sarah Palin, in January, announced her energy goal of generating half the state’s electricity from renewable resources by 2025. Some lawmakers have lamented the lack of a clear plan to accomplish that, although Palin’s administration has said they are working toward realization.

The legislators could subscribe to Palin’s goal, or craft a vision of their own.

“Is the governor’s vision our vision? Is it a reasonable vision, and is it an attainable vision?” Millet said. “We might come up with a different vision.”

Also at Wednesday’s hearing, the Alaska Natural Gas Development Authority updated lawmakers on a proposed public-private partnership commercializing North Slope propane.

Alaska Center for Energy and Power offered details on a new program dedicated to wind-diesel generation in remote areas.