

Fink seeks GOP nomination

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• May 17, 1973 — "The state money (should) be invested inside the state at moderate interest rates, thereby creating more jobs, providing better housing at less cost, and creating an economic environment which could result in lowered rents without regulations."

• Dec. 16, 1979 — "It is crystal clear that the first call on the permanent fund should be to provide mortgage money. The permanent fund, in so far as real estate money is needed in the state, has unlimited funds to be the secondary mortgage market for the state."

• July 15, 1982 — "Rather than invest it on Wall Street or put it into gold or foreign currencies, I propose that we invest the permanent fund in home mortgages right here in Alaska."

So, it should be crystal clear: If Tom Fink is elected governor, you can bet a case of platitudes that the legislature will be under some hefty pressure to crack open the piggy bank and start buying mortgages.

If he wins, he won't unpack a whole lot of surprises when he moves into the governor's mansion next January.

Fink's backers believe the two-time gubernatorial candidate's consistency is a key in his efforts to secure the GOP nomination. His supporters, says campaign aide Bill Blesington, "tend to be people who are fed up with the crop of politicians who govern by opinion poll."

Debbie Fink says that's why her father "has been so outspoken . . ."

"He truly believes that what he wants for the state is what most of the people also want."

Friends and foes alike also point to another side of Tom Fink's political personality. He has, they say in so many words, never been reluctant to jump in front of a bandwagon.

Old Capitol comrades recall the drug bill debates of the late 1960s, when most conservatives were lining up to push for harsher penalties for marijuana possession. They remember that Tom Fink, a conservative Republican and strong opponent of drug use, chaired the House Judiciary Committee that turned out a bill reducing pot possession from a felony to a misdemeanor.

"It was part of a whole new package of about six drug bills," Fink explains. "In most cases, they made penalties more severe."

The argument in support of reducing the classification of pot possession was that juries were reluctant to convict offenders of a felony than they would be if the offense were a misdemeanor, he said.

Fink remains strongly opposed to the use of marijuana and other drugs, but has recently said he would push for a public vote on how the state should handle the issue.

Fink's old House colleagues also recall that when the first big push to tax the oil industry came along, most of the Republicans were against it. They remember that Tom Fink, a solid cornerstone of the legislature's business block, backed the initial drive to impose a severance tax on the industry. (Later, when the industry complained that lawmakers were going overboard in their attempts to squeeze revenues from the oil companies, Fink took up the industry cause.)

"Up through about 1972, I was in favor of raising taxes" on oil, he says. Then, when Alaska's oil taxes approached the levels imposed in other states, "I said we ought not be charging more than the average of what the other oil producing states were charging."

In 1975, the legislature, caught in the winds of public reform, passed a bill that required elected officials to disclose all sources of income over \$100. To comply, Fink, a life insurance agent, would have to list clients to whom he sold policies. He viewed that as a violation of his occupational ethics.

So he resigned.

Tom Fink's journey from a small Illinois farm to his second campaign for governor of Alaska didn't start in a log cabin or on a mountaintop in Tennessee.

But it is littered with the stuff of the American dream. For starters, he had to

work on that little farm. Those soybeans didn't grow by themselves.

His wife of 31 years, Pat, has told friends and family that she fell in love with Tom Fink when she was 12. The couple started dating when she was 15 and he, 16.

He graduated from Chilli-cothe High School in post-war 1946, worked his way through Bradley University and, later, the University of Illinois school of law by, among other things, working as a drug store clerk.

He and Pat married in 1951. The couple soon struck out for Alaska in search of adventure and opportunity. Fink landed a job as a law clerk in the Anchorage firm of Kay, Robison and Moody the next year.

"He worked for us for, oh, about six months to a year," says Anchorage attorney Wendell Kay. "He was always a real fine young man, pleasant, industrious, just like he is today."

But Fink's law career took a lump in 1953 when he failed the bar exam.

Kay downplays the importance of that. "It happens to a lot of people," he says.

And most of them simply go back to the books and cram for the next exam.

Not Tom Fink.

"When I was growing up," says Debbie Fink, "we always heard this 'independent' routine."

"He would say, 'don't tell me everybody else is doing it; what are you going to do?'"

Fink applied the same philosophy to his problems with



"Fink" T-shirts are the in thing for Tom Fink's wife and 11 children.

Anchorage Daily News/Barbara Krizan

the bar exam.

He, and a handful of others, sued the territorial attorney general.

"We alleged, basically, that we in fact did pass," Fink recalls. In those days, bar exams were graded by the attorney general and his assistants, "and we wanted to get a re-evaluation of the grades."

"However, we never got a hearing on it. The trial judge said he wasn't going to let us go on any fishing expeditions."

Disenchanted, Fink shifted

to another gear. In 1953, he became vice president of a local bank.

By the turn of that decade, Fink was established in the insurance business. And by the turn of the next, he was established in the state legislature. By the mid-1970s, he was speaker of the House.

"He was a devil's advocate type player," says Mike Bradner, a Democrat and former House member who, naturally enough, found himself and Fink on opposite sides of most issues during their years in the Capitol.

"I've often heard people say that Tom's best role was as minority advocate," Bradner says. "He tended to be willing, if everyone else was running one way, to maybe stem the tide a bit and say, 'wait a minute, that's not my bag.' . . ."

"Generally, he is personally prepared, and if he isn't prepared he will say so, and still ask questions," Bradner said. "By that I mean, Tom would be personally prepared — not always depending on his staff. I think that's what I

appreciated most about him — you may be on opposite sides, but if both sides are prepared, progress is occurring."

Daughter Debbie admits that she and her dad don't see eye to eye on every issue. But, she says, he applies the same style to hearthside debates he uses on the campaign trail.

"He's a hard person to discuss things with," she said, "because he always has these facts and figures at his fingertips."



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