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Governor talks Mat-Su issues at meeting with chamber members | Local News Stories

8-10 minutes

WASILLA — Of the questions he was asked at Tuesday’s Greater Wasilla Chamber of Commerce meeting, none stumped Gov. Sean Parnell like the one asking if he had an idea for what to do with the M/V Susitna ferry.

“I think that’s called ‘trolling the governor,’” Parnell said, using Internet slang to joke about how the question left him stymied.

Parnell said he’d be happy to facilitate meetings if the Mat-Su Borough — which is paying for a ferry it has no way to use — needs him to.

Borough Mayor Larry DeVilbiss drew applause when he said the state is working on a solution to the ferry problem.

“It’s called the bridge,” DeVilbiss said, referencing the proposed Knik Arm Bridge, a connection between Anchorage and Mat-Su that would make the ferry unnecessary.

Speaking of the bridge, Stu Graham, manager of a local gym, asked the governor why he wasn’t working harder to get the span built.

“I personally haven’t seen a whole lot of support from the governor’s office,” Graham said. “Do you think we can expect to see the governor’s office come out and say, ‘let’s build this damn bridge?’”

Parnell pushed back.

“I think your perception is way off base,” he told Graham.

He said that the permits for the bridge are years away and in the meantime the state needs to focus on other projects that can actually be built next year. He conceded that bridge legislation was stalled in the Legislature.

“There were a lot of reasons why that got balled up, but it wasn’t for lack of trying on the part of the (Mat-Su) delegation or on the part of the office of the governor,” he said.

In his remarks to the chamber, Parnell praised the Mat-Su delegation for the work it did bringing projects back to the Valley.

“I’m just pleased to be a part of that,” he said.

Something he’s also pleased with is recent progress on the projects to bring North Slope natural gas to market. He said a major pipeline project, one for a small-diameter line, seems to have narrowed in on Big Lake as a good place to end the line. The other, the large-diameter pipe, announced Nikiski is the best bet.

He pointed out that both projects have laid out plans for pipes running from the Slope to Southcentral Alaska.

“These projects are converging,” the governor said. “I’m kind of excited about the direction Alaska is headed.”

He also took some time to blast the federal government, first by pointing out that while the federal government is in the middle of a crisis and has been shut down, “your state government is working for you.”

One issue he singled out — regulations saying that when a person floats on a river and passes through a federal refuge he has to pull in his fishing lines.

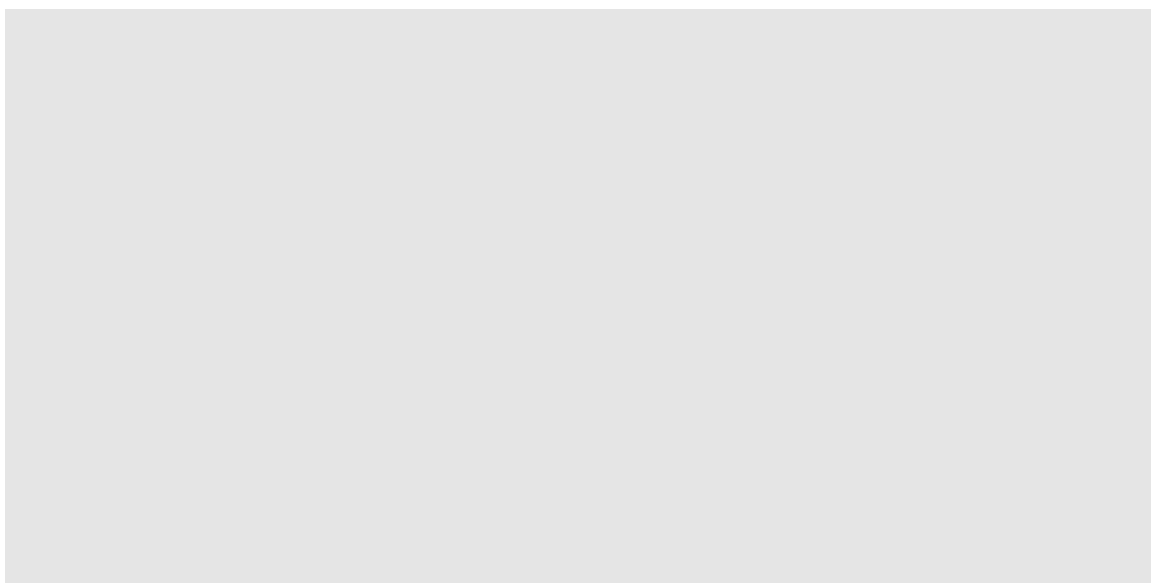
“I told the federal government, ‘that’s crazy talk,’” Parnell said.

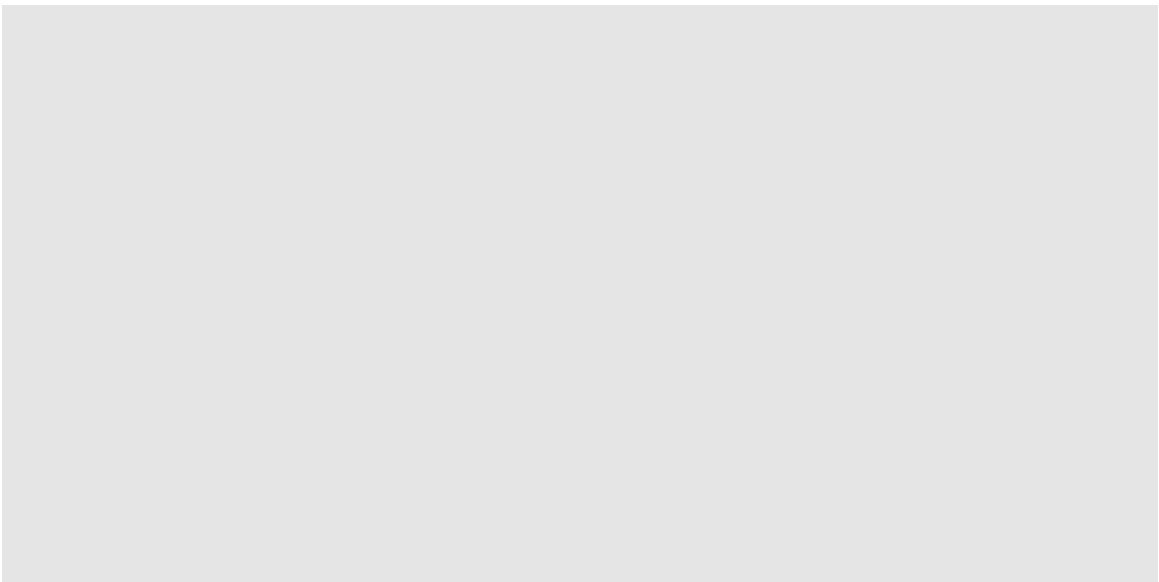
He also didn’t have good things to say about the ongoing rollout of major provisions of the Affordable Care Act, known colloquially as Obamacare.

“I don’t have a solution that I can pull out of my hat. A lot of this has been done to us, not for us,” he said. “Unless we are willing to stand up and say ‘no’ it is going to continue.”

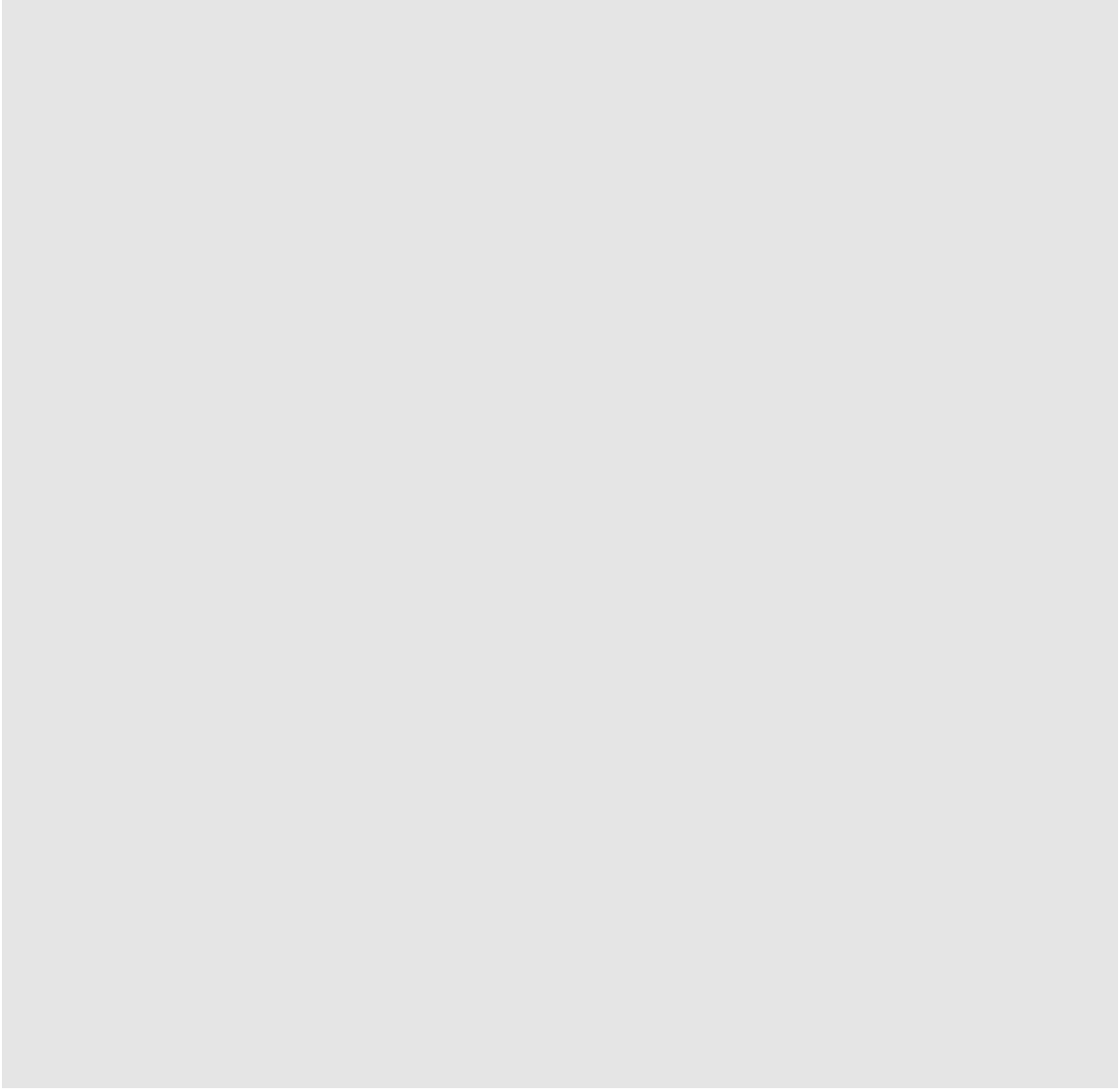
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