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Representative Fred Dyson

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Assembly Ignores Whittier Annexation Issue **Dyson Asks, "Is Anchorage Missing Historic Opportunity?"**

By Rep. Fred Dyson

These are exciting times for the Municipality of Anchorage. Our community continues to grow in population, in wealth, in culture and in optimism. The future looks reasonably good for the next three to five years, and very good for the next 20 years.

That future could be even brighter for the residents of Anchorage and surrounding areas, if Anchorage would take advantage of a formal statement by the city council of Whittier that they would like to start discussions that could lead to their becoming a part of a restructured Anchorage.

Whittier has a marvelous deep-water, ice-free port, and is the gateway for recreational boating in Prince Williams Sound. Having the Whittier Port as a part of the Port of Anchorage system would save tens of millions of dollars, and avoid some of the present problems the Port of Anchorage is experiencing with sea ice, dredging, and surface (vehicular) traffic. In addition, residents of Southcentral Alaska could have greatly increased small boat moorage and access to the wonders of Prince William Sound.

Despite the potentially significant benefits of opening discussion on such a prospect, Anchorage's municipal government has demonstrated a distressing lack of enthusiasm. Mayor George Wuerch, whom I greatly admire, has shown no interest in considering ways to accommodate Whittier's desire to retain a degree of local control within a restructured municipality, and not simply become another Anchorage service area.

While the mayor is right to be concerned about the disadvantages of including too many small local governments under the Municipality's umbrella, I disagree with his assumption that the present unified Municipality works optimally for every community within our municipal borders, and with his dismissal of any need to consider changes. I suspect echoes of my disagreement would not be hard to hear among many residents Chugiak/Eagle River, Girdwood or even the Hillside, who have sometimes chafed at how the Municipality has dealt with them.

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In the face of the mayor's reluctance, a month ago I asked Anchorage Assembly members to form a task force to explore the possibility of restructuring Anchorage to allow Whittier to join us and to give Chugiak/Eagle River, and Girdwood more self-determination. Not one Assembly member has answered my letter or called me, and they appear to have no interest in seizing this historic opportunity. How sad—where are the leaders and dreamers who built this great land?

Local leaders and statesmen demonstrated confidence and vision when they consolidated the old city and borough governments into the unified Municipality of Anchorage more than a quarter of a century ago. If our community is to continue advancing confidently into a prosperous future, we cannot be blind to the opportunities to adjust our municipal borders and organization to meet new opportunities. The Anchorage Assembly should engage Whittier and Chugiak/Eagle River in rethinking a common future.

Rep. Fred Dyson is chair of the House Health, Education and Social Services Committee. He is in his third term representing the residents of Eagle River in District 25, and served on the Anchorage Assembly from 1985-91.

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