

# Hayes criticizes elimination of Rural Scholarship Loan Program

Republican Gubernatorial candidate Joe Hayes today criticized the elimination of the rural teacher scholarship loan program as "inexcusable and extremely unfair to the 72 Alaskans working to become rural teachers." Hayes authored the bill creating the program in 1984.

Under the program, loans up to \$7500 annually were made available to Alaskans to pursue teaching careers and who would then return to their home region to teach.

"When the Legislature created the program in 1984, it was designed to meet a need to provide teachers in bush communities who had an understanding of the lifestyles and culture of the people they would be teaching," Hayes said.

"Too often inexperienced teachers from outside come here seeking an Alaskan experience...but the experience they provide for students is often less than adequate, and many of these teachers leave after a year or

two. As a result, both education and the students suffer."

Originally funded at a level of \$600,000, the Sheffield administration has proposed funding for next year at half that amount and had also expressed an intent to phase out the program. In the final day of the recent legislative session, funding for the program was eliminated from the budget leaving the 72 Alaskans already involved in teaching programs without access to the special loan fund.

"I sincerely hope that the administration will demonstrate a serious commitment to rural education by using discretionary money to keep the program going. It provided added incentives to undertake teaching careers in rural areas which our regular student loan program does not offer," Hayes said.

"The program had very strong bipartisan support when it passed the Legislature and deserves to be continued."