

Longevity Bonus not income

WASHINGTON — An amendment to the Social Security bill, H.R. 10727, that will allow some elderly Alaskans to take one of the worries out of growing old, moved one step closer to law today.

The amendment, proposed by Sen. Mike Gravel, D-Alaska, will exempt the Alaska Longevity Bonus as income when computing Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits.

When Gravel explained the Longevity Bonus to the Senate Finance Committee today they had no objection to Gravel's amendment to exempt the bonus.

With the tacit approval of the Finance Committee, the amendment is expected to pass the full Senate without difficulty sometime this week.

The Alaska Longevity Bonus was established by the state in 1972. It offered \$100 per month to anyone who, as of July 1, 1973, had lived in the state for 24 years and was 65 years of age or older.

Under the Social Security Act of 1972, which implemented SSI benefits for the aged, disabled and blind, the longevity bonus

would have been considered as income. Because of that provision many longtime Alaskans stood to lose \$80 per month in SSI benefits.

In addition, many Medicaid patients would have lost their SSI benefits.

The Department of Health, Education and Welfare in 1975 decided to incorporate the longevity bonus into a demonstration project so that those involved would not lose their SSI benefits.

That program, however, was scheduled to end December 31 of this year. On request from the Alaska Congressional delegation, HEW agreed to extend the demonstration project till June, 1976.

Gravel's action will, by that time, have eliminated the longevity bonus as income in the computation of SSI benefits.

Gravel said he was pleased to see that the Finance Committee

considered the needs of aged Alaskans.

"This was a program set up so Alaskan pioneers could afford to remain in the state," Gravel said. "I am glad to see that what the state has done won't be negated by the federal government."