

## Health care: A basic right to Alaskans

Dear Editor:

I believe access to adequate and affordable health care is a basic right, but today, more than 76,000 Alaskans are without health care.

Rising health care costs and the lack of basic health services in rural areas are critical problems in Alaska. The Health Resources and Access Task Force, which conducted a 16-month statewide health care study, shows that the health of Alaska's population is among the worst in the nation. Major reasons are inadequate medical services in rural Alaska, lack of water and sewer systems in many villages, and a continuing decrease in state public health spending.

We should not be lulled into complacency by the arguments that Alaska should wait for national health care reform. When national reform comes about, it may not address the unique problems we face in Alaska.

Health care expenditures in Alaska in 1991 totaled more than \$1.5 billion, compared to \$480 million in 1979. If the trend continues, Alaskans will pay almost \$5.6 billion annually for health care by the year 2003, although thousands of rural and urban residents will still be without adequate health care. If we begin now to reform Alaska's health care delivery system, annual expenditures will be less than \$4 billion by 2003, and all Alaskans will have access to health care.

By controlling health care costs, more resources can be devoted to maintaining a strong public health infrastructure in rural Alaska. The public health system should be the cornerstone of community and personal health. Reform cannot be achieved unless it is based on the prevention of disease and violence, and the promotion of personal healthful habits.

Nearly one-third of Alaska's population lives in an area without a physician. As a result, most rural Alaskans must travel to obtain health care. However, the Alaska Native Health Board reported in 1991 that 40 percent of the patients who need to travel defer medical treatment because

they lack airfare. Recruiting and retaining doctors, nurses, physician assistants or nurse practitioners in rural Alaska is a critical need.

The health status of Alaska Natives is significantly lower than other Alaskans, according to the task force. Native residents' health needs far outstrip the resources available through the Alaska Area Native Health Service and its tribal contractors.

Clean air, clean land, clean water and clean food are the basics of good health. It is government's responsibility to provide rural Alaskans with water and sewer systems, and the essential health services to address such problems as infant mortality, drug and alcohol abuse, suicide and domestic violence.

Proposals are before the Legislature to reform the health care system to serve all Alaskans — urban and rural. Senate Bill 114, which I have introduced, follows the recommendations of the task force. The medical community also has a plan (CHIPRA) before the Legislature. Although they differ in some respects, the goal is the same: to provide adequate, affordable health care for all Alaskans. Working together, we can formulate a plan that will succeed in Alaska.

Sincerely,  
Senator Jim Duncan  
Alaska State Legislature

## Goldbelt shareholder concerned about term limits

Dear Editor:

The Goldbelt Board of Directors are doing something unusual for the 1993 annual meeting. They are proposing an amendment to the bylaws offering three options on term limitations for shareholders to vote on.

If option 2 (2 terms), or option 3 (3 terms, is approved, term limit will not apply to all current members of the Board who have served six, nine or more years. For example, term limit will not be in effect for directors whose terms expire in 1994. Incumbents, if re-elected in 1994, could serve again until the year 2000 or the year 2003.

If I do vote, I will be supporting

option 1 which does nothing. If the amendment had been directed at all current members of the board who have served nine or more years, I would have been comfortable with option 3.

If a term limit does not pass, I will join other shareholders to bring the issue back for another vote next year with one very important change that would make term limit "apply to all current members of the board who have served none or more years." This would be a giant step forward for the board in establishing a rapport with their shareholders. Qualified shareholders are now faced with impossible odds of beating an incumbent. Restrictions on length of service will improve the recruitment of qualified shareholders. It will also improve the method for fair elections and "not just to get reelected". (There are 2,700 Goldbelt shareholders to select interested qualified candidates from.)

Since no informational meeting is scheduled, it is important for shareholders to review their proxy material. If you have questions, contact a director in your area or, call your Juneau Goldbelt corporate headquarters. You may have other important questions that must be answered only by members of the Goldbelt Board before signing your proxy.

Sincerely,  
Margaret E. Gamble  
Goldbelt shareholder

## Legislation limits constitutional rights

Dear Editor:

Two pieces of legislation now in the Alaska Senate are pretty scary, they both limit rights laid out in the constitution.

One involves the freedom of information act and the right to know. By enacting a law to limit this right by allowing elected officials to meet in secret, frittering away the public's right to know, ends up as a dictatorship. Once this process starts, there becomes other aspects that also need to be limited, where does it end.

The second is the frivolous lawsuit action for property degradation, all over the country, NOAA and environmental protection

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agency are suing cities for situation of pollution that have gotten out of hand, where pollution into the air, ground water and rivers have been degrading health standards.

Situations where past and present disregard for hazards that will effect the poor or people considered less desirable's health. Atomic waste, dioxins, mineral like lead from smelting, there now are clean air and water standards which is good, but in many places, it seems to be priority to lower

these standards.

One city in Texas has recently been in the news because of pre-birth deaths, infant mortality, cancer in many forms and mental disorders. The United States has been moving towards social and ethnic responsibility the filling out of the Basic rights of the US Constitution. Deleting these rights in Alaska is abhorrent to me.

Rights for someone else are also your rights. If you feel concerned, write your legislature, if not?

**Ralph Guthrie  
Petersburg, AK**