

Alaskan Seniors Living Longer Growing Stronger

from the Alaska Commission on Aging

June - July 2003

The mission of the Alaska Commission on Aging is to ensure dignity and independence for Alaska's seniors and to assist them through programs and services, funded by the Commission, to lead useful and meaningful lives.



**Alaskan Seniors:
Living Longer,
Growing Stronger**
is a monthly
publication of the
Alaska Commission
on Aging (ACoA)

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Dr. Bob Taylor visits with a resident of the Bethel Senior Center during the Commission meeting there last autumn. (ACoA Staff Photo.)

Commission Appoints Doctor Bob Taylor Executive Director

At their June meeting in Anchorage June 10th, the Alaska Commission on Aging named Doctor Bob Taylor Executive Director of the Commission. Dr. Taylor has been serving the Commission as Acting Executive Director since Dr. Lyn Freeman resigned from the position in July 2002. Previously, Bob served as Social Services Program Coordinator under Dr. Freeman since January 2002. He first joined the Commission staff as NTS Coordinator in December 2001.

Bob moved to Juneau in October 2001 with his wife, Marilyn, who became Dean of Education at the University of Alaska Southeast. For the previous 25 years Bob worked in public administration as a manager in Colorado, while raising a family of three.

Bob earned his doctorate in English from the University of Denver in 1978. At that time he began working for Summit County Government in the Colorado Rockies as Director of Human Services. In that role he served as Director of Social Services and supervisor of several other programs including community nursing, drug and alcohol programs, youth and

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Overview of Senior-Related Legislation

The 23rd Legislative Session, which adjourned in May, was not a particularly fruitful one for Alaskan seniors and their advocates. Of about two dozen bills the Commission tracked during the session only five that they favored were passed. The legislature will continue to consider most of the other bills when they reconvene in January 2004.

This year, most attention focused on SB 117: Eliminating the Longevity Bonus. This bill, which the Commission opposed, failed in the House, but Governor Murkowski eliminated the program by line item veto June 12. It will be phased out over a year, during which a general relief assistance program will help seniors hardest hit by the cut.

Some of the bills the Commission watched that have not yet passed include:

HB 10: Group Health Insurance for Private Groups. This bill has passed the House and will be taken up again by the Senate Finance Committee.

HB 25: Health Care Services Directives. This is currently in the Senate Health, Education and Social Services Committee, having passed the House during the session.

HB 51: Labeling of Prescription Drugs. This bill passed the House and will be taken up by the Senate Rules Committee.

Senior-related bills passed during the session:

SB 78: Medicaid for Breast and Cervical Cancer (CHAPTER 9 SLA 03). Eliminated the sunset provision for Medicaid coverage for women with breast and cervical cancer, which had previously been passed into law.

HB 12: Harassment by Electronic Communication (CHAPTER 13 SLA 03). Adds electronic communication such as email to laws against obscene or harassing phone calls.

SB 146: Commemorative Veterans License Plate (CHAPTER 68 SLA 03). Calls for a new state license plate design that honors veterans. Proceeds from the sale of the plates will benefit veterans programs.

HB 76: Appropriations: Mental Health Budget (CHAPTER 84 SLA 03). Continues funding for Mental Health Trust Authority projects, including services to persons of any age with ADRD, and persons over 60 years who experience mental illness and chronic alcoholism.

SB 13: Insurance Discrimination by Credit Rating, which would prohibit insurance companies from basing a client's rates on the individual's credit history, is awaiting the governor's signature at this writing.

Senior Advocacy Coalition Monthly Teleconferences

The Senior Advocacy Coalition meets by teleconference from 9:30 to 11:30 AM on the second Friday of every month to address issues affecting Alaska's seniors. The teleconference originates at the Anchorage Senior Center.

For more information on joining a meeting, contact Sue Samet, 261-4140, Brenda Brown, 338-6492, or 261-4848 in Anchorage; Fred Lau, 235-7655 in Homer; or Lisa Morley, 465-4798 in Juneau.

Commission Grapples with Budget Reductions at Quarterly Meeting

The Commission on Aging held its quarterly meeting in Anchorage June 11-13. The Commission focused on reviewing recommendations and granting funds for new and on-going projects under Nutrition, Transportation and Support (NTS) services, Home and Community-Based (HCB) services, the Mature Alaskans Seeking Skills Training (MASST) program, and the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority projects. They also approved pass-through funding for senior residential services in Kotzebue and Tanana.

Funding reductions complicated the grant process this year, as grantees are faced with the challenge of continuing or even increasing their services to senior Alaskans with less money to do so. The Commission's move to the Department of Health and Social Services (see page 4) will also change the way these grants are administered.

The timing of the meeting, coinciding with the announcement of Governor Murkowski's line-item vetoes to the state budget, forced the Commission to delay some final decisions. One budget reduction affected Home and Community Based Services funding for fiscal year 2004. Available funds were cut by 10% for adult day programs, and 20% for care coordination programs. This amounts to a loss of about \$334,000. HCB draws solely from state general funds, unlike NTS and MASST, which are federally funded. To deal with this issue, the Commission will meet via teleconference on Tuesday, July 1 at 8:30 AM.

The Commission began planning for their autumn quarterly meeting. The Commission holds the autumn meeting somewhere outside of Anchorage or Juneau, usually in rural communities. The Commission is looking at holding the meeting in Barrow, and has tentatively set it for the second week of September.

Commission Names New Director (continued from page 1)

family, and senior citizens.

As Human Services Director, Bob worked over several years with the local private non-profit to develop a full-fledged seniors program. The program included housing construction, recreation and socialization, in-home assistance and health care, and congregate meals. By the late 1980s the program had completed the county's first multipurpose senior center.

In the mid-1980s Bob pursued a masters in public administration in a program for working executives at the University of Denver. After completing that degree he was promoted to Assistant County Manager. He was promoted to County Manager in 1990, overseeing Summit County Government's 500 employees, 35 departments, and a \$65 million budget. Summit County was at the time one of the fastest growing resort communities in the nation. Before Bob resigned the position to relocate to Juneau, he had worked closely with Summit County seniors over a two-year period to develop a new state-of-the-art, 10,000 square-foot seniors center, which now houses an adult daycare program. A contiguous assisted living complex is also planned.

Dr. Taylor's immediate challenges with the Commission on Aging include moving the Commission and staff to the Department of Health and Social Services (see page 4) and ensuring continued funding to ACoA grantees through the transition and budget cuts. He is also working to finalize the Alaska Commission on Aging State Plan for Services, a process complicated by the transition to the new department, and to manage changes to the Commission membership. Within the last few months Commissioner Bob Gregovich Jr. resigned, Ray Matiashowski replaced Alison Elgee as designee for the Commissioner of the Department of Administration, and Gene Kane was appointed designee for the Commissioner of the Department of Community and Economic Development. Shortly, the Department of Health and Social Services will replace designee Jonathan Sherwood with Steve Ashman.

