

Alaskan Seniors Living Longer Growing Stronger



Frank H. Murkowski
Governor

from the Alaska Commission on Aging

June 2005



Joel Gilbertson
Commissioner

Alaskan Seniors Gather for White House Conference on Aging Sessions



A crowd of seniors and other interested community members forms small groups to discuss a hot topic at the Anchorage Senior Center on Friday, April 22nd for a community forum to offer ideas and recommendations for the 2005 White House Conference on Aging. The event drew about 130 participants. (ACoA Staff photo.)

In preparation for the 2005 White House Conference on Aging, the Alaska Commission on Aging has held community forums in Juneau, Anchorage and Wasilla to identify the concerns and compile the suggestions of older Alaskans. A Fairbanks forum is planned for Friday, June 3rd. The White House Conference on Aging is held approximately every ten years to plan aging policy for the decade to come.

Participants' suggestions in response to the forum topics have ranged from creating a universal single-

payer health care system to providing better night-time transportation options for seniors to building inter-generational programs to increase seniors' opportunities for participation in their communities.

Opinions often differ on the reasons for and preferred solutions to problems such as the uncertain funding of the Social Security program. Nevertheless, all ideas and options have been welcomed by event organizers. All recommendations will be contained in reports on each separate event, and will be compiled into a

statewide report and set of recommendations to be completed before the White House Conference occurs. (As they are completed, reports will be posted to the Commission on Aging's Web site, www.alaskaaging.org.)

The first community forum took place in Juneau on February 25th, following the Alaska Commission on Aging's February meeting in Juneau. The event was co-sponsored by the Juneau Commission on Aging and hosted by the Juneau Senior Center. Over 50 people
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Alaskan Seniors: Living Longer, Growing Stronger
a monthly publication of the
Alaska Commission on Aging
(ACoA).

The mission of the Alaska Commission on Aging is to advocate for policies, programs, and services that promote the dignity and independence of Alaska's seniors and help them maintain a meaningful quality of life.

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2005 ACoA Legislative Report: Session Brings SeniorCare, Other Wins for Alaskan Seniors

Senior advocates celebrated the continuation of a much-needed program for low-income Alaskan seniors with the passage of House Bill 106 in early May. SeniorCare, which currently provides cash or prescription drug benefits to Alaskans age 65 and over whose income is less than 135% of the poverty level, had been scheduled to expire on January 1, 2006.

Passage of HB 106, which extends the SeniorCare program through June 30, 2007, ensures that more than 7,000 seniors who rely on the program's \$120-a-month cash assistance can breathe a sigh of relief for the foreseeable future. An additional group of seniors will now be eligible for prescription drug assistance, and will be able to select the appropriate Medicare Part D (prescription drug) coverage when registration for that program begins later this year.

Although the final bill capped income eligibility for the prescription drug program at \$20,913 for a single person or \$28,053 for a couple (175% of the current Alaska poverty level) rather than the original 300% level proposed by Governor Murkowski, many advocates felt that the benefits of passing a bill this session were important enough to compromise on the extent to which the program would be broadened.

Those eligible for the prescription drug program will have their Medicare Part D (prescription drug) premiums and deductibles paid by the State, from the SeniorCare fund. Seniors with incomes less than \$16,133 for a single, or \$21,641 for a couple (135% of the 2005 poverty level) continue to be eligible for cash assistance of \$120 per month. These individuals will have their Medicare Part D costs covered by the federal government.

The Legislature approved establishing a new Alaska SeniorCare Fund as an account in the General Fund. The fund consists of the balance of money in the former SeniorCare fund established by the Legislature last year. The Department of Health and Social Services estimates that there will be sufficient funds for program needs in fiscal year 2006, but will ask for an increase of approximately \$12 million for fiscal year 2007.

In a May 5th memo to the House Finance Committee during their deliberations on the bill, Alaska Commission on Aging Executive Director Linda Gohl noted, "We all wish to have the ability to plan our household incomes for the coming year; low-income seniors in particular have a great need to know **(Continued on page 3.)**"

2005 Legislative Report (continued from page 2)

whether or not they will be able to count on these benefits for the year to come. These older Alaskans are the people who took the risks (financial and otherwise) required to build a new state, create communities and raise families in a very challenging environment. They love Alaska and want to remain in their homes as they age, and all Alaskans benefit from their years of wisdom and their continuing contributions to our communities. We should ensure that they are given the help they need to avoid traumatic out-of-state moves or relocation to substandard housing.”

The final version of the bill specifies exact income eligibility levels which equate to 135% and 175% of the 2005 Alaska poverty levels. However, these specific income limits will not expand automatically during 2006 and 2007 if the poverty level is increased.

Provider Seat Added to Commission on Aging

The Alaska Commission on Aging requested legislation (House Bill 156, introduced by Representative Holm) to change a Department of Administration seat on the Commission to a senior services provider seat. The DOA seat dated to the time when the Commission on Aging was located within the Department of Administration. The Commission has no remaining connection to that

department.

Originally, the ACoA had asked to have the seat converted to a public seat. But after a request by senior services providers at the Commission’s February 2005 meeting, the ACoA took action to specify that the seat-holder be a senior services provider regardless of age, and be a voting member. Legislators adopted this amendment to the bill, as well as an additional suggestion that the Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development seat on the Commission be made a voting seat.

The bill passed and currently awaits the Governor’s signature. Once approved, all eleven of the Alaska Commission on Aging’s seats will be voting seats. The provider seat and one of the public seats are unfilled. Also, Nome resident Dan Karmun’s term will expire August 31, 2005, and he cannot be reappointed, as he will have served two four-year terms. The senior services provider as well as one public member may be a person of any age. Anyone interested in consideration for these seats may send a letter of interest to Office of the Governor, Boards & Commissions, P.O. Box 110001, Juneau, AK 99811-0001.

Other Bills Impacting Seniors Become Law

During the legislative session,

the Alaska Commission on Aging maintains an extensive list of bills of interest to seniors that it tracks and discusses at bi-weekly legislative teleconferences. Those bills introduced but not passed this session may be taken up again in 2006. Bills of interest to seniors that did pass during the 2005 session include the following:

Senate Bill 60, Extending Suicide Prevention Council.

Sponsored by Senator Ben Stevens, this bill extended the sunset date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council to June 30, 2009. The Suicide Prevention Council has closely coordinated with the Commission on Aging and the other boards who work with the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority. Suicide is a problem among all age groups in Alaska.

House Bill 131, Access Device and ID Document Crimes.

This bill, sponsored by Representative Stoltze, increases the criminal classification for stealing an access device (such as an ATM card) or obtaining one by fraud. Seniors are frequently targets of identity theft and financial fraud.

House Bill 161, Re-employment of Retirees.

This bill, sponsored by Representative Elkins, permits re-employment and benefits for retired teachers and public employees, ***(Concluded on page 10.)***

Seniors Gather for WHCOA Sessions *(continued from page 1)*

attended. A later seniors-only event sponsored by the Juneau Commission on Aging at the Fireweed Place senior apartments drew 23 people.

Two Anchorage events targeted slightly different populations. An evening event at the Anchorage Sheraton Hotel during the Full Lives Conference on April 21st focused on input from large employers, senior services providers, direct service workers, and Full Lives Conference participants. Some 35 people participated in the Full Lives community forum, which featured a keynote speech by geriatric social worker Marty Richards (see below). An April 22nd community forum at the Anchorage Senior

Center, co-sponsored by the Municipality of Anchorage, the Anchorage Senior Citizens Advisory Commission, and the Anchorage Senior Center, drew a crowd of 130 people. This event was geared toward seniors, caregivers, and service providers.

On May 19th, following its two-day Matanuska Valley meeting, the Alaska Commission on Aging held a community forum at the Lake Lucille Inn in Wasilla. About 25 people participated in a lively discussion of four main topics: Health and Long-Term Care, Financial Security, Community Resources, and Social Well-Being.

All of the sessions have featured small group

discussions among participants on several main topics, followed by each group's reporting on its top recommendations during the session. All other recommendations are collected, and will be included in event reports. Nancy Karacand, an ACoA staff member, has acted as the facilitator for the events.

The final community forum in ACoA's "The Future of Aging in Alaska" series will be held in Fairbanks on Friday, June 3rd, from 1:00 to 4:30 p.m. at the Westmark Fairbanks Hotel, 813 Noble Street. Seniors, caregivers, service providers, and other interested community members are welcome.

Excerpts from Marty Richards' Full Lives Community Forum Keynote Address

The following comments are printed with permission from Marty Richards, MSW, ACSW. Ms. Richards is an affiliate assistant professor at the University of Washington, Seattle Institute on Aging and teaches through the Institute on Aging and The NW Geriatric Education Center.)

"...I hope to raise some issues that I have been thinking about in my almost 40 years of social work practice working in the community, working in mostly not-for-profit arenas with older adults and their families.

"I want to start with a quote that's an Asian saying from many years ago; I think it relates to the topic at hand for this evening: A young man said to a very old man, 'What is your greatest burden as you

grow old?' The ancient one replied, 'That I have nothing to carry.'

"...We have been conditioned to believe that the newest technology and ideas are the best, while really we have a lot to learn from people who have been around for a while. And yet there is so much to be learned from that lifelong experience, much of which is sitting in this room, and much of which is out there as we interact with our families, our

communities of faith, our work settings, our consumers, all of that.

"So I've been asked to address the following question: How can the leadership, experience and wisdom of elders be acknowledged as a treasured community resource and incorporated into a community decision-making process?

(Continued on page 7.)

Director's Voice



Commission staff has successfully weathered the 2005 legislative session. On behalf of the Commission, I am pleased to say that our bi-monthly legislative teleconferences were well attended, and participants were able to collaborate on advocacy strategies to

support or oppose proposed legislation that would impact seniors. We will be doing more outreach this fall to let folks know where and when our teleconferences are held, and how they may join us in our advocacy efforts on behalf of older Alaskans and their caregivers. (Please see page for more information regarding the outcome of legislation.)

You may have recently seen newspaper or heard radio public service announcements related to Alzheimer's Disease and the role of the ACoA. This is part

of a media campaign paid for by the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority on behalf of its beneficiaries. The campaign's purpose is to raise public awareness of mental health issues, and that the individuals affected may be our friends, family members, neighbors and co-workers.

In early March, ACoA staff learned of a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) grant opportunity to expand mental health service capacity for seniors. The emphasis of the grant *(Continued on page 12.)*

Commissioners' Corner



At the May meeting of the Alaska Commission on Aging, Commission members selected Frank Appel of Anchorage as their new chair. Appel, who had previously been the Commission's vice chair, replaces Banarsi Lal of Fairbanks, who served as Commission chair for the past four years. Sharon Howerton-Clark of Homer was chosen to be the new vice chair.

Appel, who has been a member of the Commission on Aging since the fall of 2003, worked for 20 years for the University of Alaska,

Frank Appel Named New Chair of Commission on Aging

including several years as Associate Vice Chancellor for Business Studies at the University of Alaska Anchorage. He earned a masters degree from Seattle University, and worked as a Certified Public Accountant. He is now a private consultant.

Appel also serves on the Anchorage Sister Cities Commission and is a member of the Anchorage Rotary Club. In the past, he has been a member of the Anchorage Municipal Transit Advisory Board, as well as a board member for the Alzheimer's Resource Agency of Alaska and the Volunteers of America of Alaska. Appel has also participated in United Way of Anchorage review committees, the Chugach Electric Association bylaws

committee, the Service Corp of Retired Executives, and Bridge Builders.

"I am honored to have been elected as chair, and will try to build upon our progress in advocating for seniors," said Appel.

"I will be recommending several goals to the commission for the coming year," Appel continued. "Among the most important of those goals will be the development and collection of data that supports our preparation of a state plan and supports ACOA legislative advocacy activity, and the building of an advocacy network to promote issues of importance to the senior community."

Consumer News New MyPyramid Food Guidance System Announced



Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns has unveiled MyPyramid, a new interactive food guidance system. MyPyramid, which replaces the Food Guide Pyramid introduced in 1992, is part of an overall food guidance system that emphasizes

the need for a more individualized approach to improving diet and lifestyle.

MyPyramid incorporates recommendations from the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which was released by the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services in January. The Dietary Guidelines provide authoritative advice about how proper dietary habits can promote health and reduce the risk of major

chronic diseases. MyPyramid was developed to carry the messages of the Dietary Guidelines and to make Americans aware of the vital health benefits of simple and modest improvements in nutrition, physical activity, and lifestyle behavior.

Consumers can get more in-depth and personalized information from the new Web site, www.MyPyramid.gov, so that they can make these choices to fit their own needs.

Project Updates



Over 1,200 completed surveys of senior concerns have arrived at the

Alaska Commission on Aging office since the surveys were first released in February, according to Commission staff. The two-page survey was printed in

Senior Surveys Pouring In

the April issue of the Senior Voice newspaper, which is sent to over 13,000 people statewide. Surveys have also been distributed at the White House Conference on Aging community forums held by the Alaska Commission on Aging and local groups.

Those who have not yet completed a survey and wish to do so may print copies from www.alaskaaging.org/

[blueprint/WHCOASurvey1.pdf](#) and mail their responses to the Alaska Commission on Aging at P.O. Box 110693, Juneau, AK 99801-0693 before the end of June.

Survey responses are being entered into a computer database, which will allow them to be analyzed in detail. Results are expected to be available in July.

Contractor Chosen for Study of Senior Economic Status

The Institute of Social and Economic Research at the University of Alaska Anchorage has been awarded a contract to conduct an updated study of senior economic status for the Alaska Commission on Aging. This project follows up on a study conducted in 2000 for

the ACoA by the McDowell Group. The past five years have seen the end of the Longevity Bonus, smaller PFD payments, growing medical costs, and other changes that may impact the economic status of older Alaskans. The study will review demographic factors, changes

in benefit programs affecting older Alaskans, and the beneficial impact of seniors on the economies of Alaskan communities. The final report is due September 30, 2005 and will be available on the ACoA Web site later this fall.

Marty Richards Keynote Address (*continued from page 4*)

“...What I think we’ll be fleshing out tonight in the discussion is, how do we ensure that older people play a vital role in Alaska communities, in all the communities you represent, and what strategies can we use to begin to look at changing the attitudes towards aging.

“...There is no one right answer. My job is to get you thinking about some of the possibilities. And it will change.

“What we might see as being relevant for today for somebody who is a hundred, as my aunt is, as some of you heard earlier today, might change for my 85 year old friend, or might change for me as a 60 year old, or might change for a 40 year old who will be 60 in a few years.

“So I think we have to ask the question, what gives meaning and purpose to the older adults? Some of you are older adults right now. Some of you work with older adults...and it’s an individual thing and it’s a community thing as well.

“What works against a sense of meaning and purpose in our society? What are those things that say, I’m not important? How is advertising, the media and other things out there working against a positive view? And I’m saying you don’t have to be fully physically able or mentally able to be able to

give back. I think our society has marginalized people who weren’t a hundred percent in all of those ways, but we have much to give and much to learn from people who might be differently able than we are.

“And I want to suggest that a part of the work that’s being done now—how many of you know this book, *Aging Well*, that’s the longitudinal study of the Harvard graduates and gifted women in California where they followed people across the life cycle. ...They looked at people in college and studied them over time.

“...It’s a good read, it’s very well written. And in it they make four suggestions for successful aging, and I think about how this might inform our discussion this evening.

“To be successful in our aging we need to have a strong social network, we need to have an active leisure life, we need to have an active creative side, and a plan for life-long learning. Does that say anything about keeping our elders involved and vital and a part of the decision in policy-making of the future?

“It seems to me that these are important to emphasize as part of acknowledging elders as a resource. Meaning is also derived from connections with others; we don’t do anything alone. Finding ways to rebuild and rekindle networks is

important. Ossie Davis said something in Denver back in, I think it was 2002... He said: ‘The time for our wisdom, for our experience, for the knowledge that we have has come.’

“ ‘The problems of the world grow more onerous every day. Half of the people in the world work for less than \$2 a day. I was reading in the Denver Post [again this was 2002] that in 50 years there will be more senior citizens than there are young people in the world. Who is to address these problems if not us? We should take advantage of our position, our authority and our power. We can no longer make excuses by saying ‘nobody listens to me’ anymore. If we get together like this and join hands and hearts and minds and souls and voices, they will listen. Oh, yes, they will listen.’

“And it was powerful when he said it, and I just recently reread that quote and I think it’s an important part of this whole question.

“I think we have to also consider what Maggie Kuhn said about the roles of elders.... She talked about how we need to be mentors as we are elders, we need to be mediators in situations, we need to be monitors of what’s going on, and keeping people honest about the situation, and we need to be mobilizers. We also have to look at the (*Continued on page 8.*)

Marty Richards Keynote Address (*continued from page 7*)

issue of volunteerism.

“I’m in social work because I was a volunteer in Girl Scouts. I started working with older people in 1963 in a nursing home. I think volunteerism is an important part of what many older adults do, but it’s an important part of what many younger adults do, and we don’t teach volunteerism in younger life....I think part of making people an integral part of the community is to look at this whole issue of volunteerism.

“But a word of caution...I think we have to be careful that we don’t assume that volunteers are going to do everything and not pay people what they are worth when the jobs need to be paid for and not taken by a volunteer. I don’t want to be heard as saying that volunteering is the answer to everything, and I’ve heard that argument on occasion. “So I think older people have to teach volunteering, but we need to be about raising that up across the life cycle....

“People have the potential to grow and change throughout their life cycle. Who we are today is not what we’re going to be tomorrow. How many of you are the same person you were ten years ago? Wouldn’t that be scary? At least for me it would be scary. Things are always in flux, so as we think about how the elders can give back, we also have to be thinking about how they are changing, too.

“It makes a lot of older adults that I know angry when they are asked to do something that other people assume they are going to do. Like, I do a lot of work with communities of faith, and older pastors are seen as visitation pastors. Maybe they would like to do something different but because they are older that’s what they assume they can do. So I think we need to think about who this person is at the time that we’re looking for their input and their knowledge and their volunteer skills.

“We’ve heard this today many times, for those of us who have been at the conference: all persons have strengths, even those who are disabled or frail. So we need to be sure that everybody’s strengths are lifted up. Elders are teachers and wisdom sharers, they are also learners. Don’t underestimate the power of life-long learning.

“...What do we have to learn from the narratives in the stories people have? This is a culture in Alaska rich in story telling, from the pioneers to the people who have worked and have lived through so much and have learned so much. What do we have to learn from those stories? Faith journeys can teach a younger generation, and not just religious but a spiritual journey, love and emotional support that goes back and forth.

“...another gift is survival skills and facing life’s challenges. Who lived through the depression, who lived through the tough times? What skills, what learnings do we have, what are those things that we can learn from the very oldest of the old? What about the baby boomers who are going to be coming into the older section of life?

“I want us to acknowledge those strengths and gifts, and you may have your own list, but they are a treasure in the sense that in the story if we listen to the narrative we can learn a lot. It can also help influence policy. It can help how we do day-to-day direct service.

“We need to look at places we don’t normally look to find the wisdom of elders and build on that and the library is one of them. How many of you work with libraries? How many of you have ever spent much time in a library and see it as a resource for older adults and disabled adults? The library is wonderful. I have a lot of librarians take my class in gerontology. How do we partner with the library? It’s a place of living history.

“...What are the groups that you can partner with that you don’t traditionally partner with?

“What about business, somebody here from the bank, somebody from Fred (*Concluded on page 9.*)

Supreme Court Ruling Eases Standard for Age Discrimination Suits

In late March 2005, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that older workers can sue in federal court on claims of “disparate impact”—failing to receive the same wages or benefits as younger employees. In the past, workers suing over claims of age discrimination had to prove that the employer had “discriminatory intent.” Under the new, less stringent standard, even if policies were not intended to be discriminatory, employers can be held liable for policies that negatively impact older workers.

However, winning an age discrimination lawsuit is likely to remain difficult. Even though the Court found that 30 police officers in Jackson, Mississippi had the right to bring a case alleging harm because younger officers were paid higher wages, the Court also dismissed the lawsuit, stating that the city’s plan to grant a larger raise to lower level employees was based on a “reasonable factor other than age.” The city claimed that its purpose was to bring salaries in line with those of surrounding areas in order to meet the legitimate

goal of retaining police officers.

The ruling could potentially affect 75 million workers over the age of 40, or nearly half of the U.S. work force.

In the past, the 1964 Civil Rights Act has been interpreted to ban discrimination resulting in “disparate impact” on the basis of race, gender, or religion. The recent ruling extends that higher level of protection to claims based on age.

Marty Richards Keynote Address (*continued from page 8*)

Meyer, maybe others of you. You were talking earlier about flex-time and retirement and people trying out some roles and opportunities over time. What are the ways that we build on that?

“... I think the bottom line question is, we need to ask what needs to be done for people to be able to work together. What are the barriers that exist that keep us from working together? And the personal/public/professional partnership we need to deal with those barriers and really speak to them. I think they often don’t get spoken to. So how do we get to somebody positively volunteering when groups can’t even talk to each other?

“What do we need to do?”

We need to listen, we need to listen, we need to listen. We need to have more earphones than we have microphones. I think what happens is that often times we have an agenda. We have to sometimes let go of our agenda, and from what I know about the really wise elders who have taught me, we’ve got to listen—more listening than speaking.

“...I’m going to leave you with a quote. There is a group in the San Francisco area called the Live Oak Institute, and they wrote a wonderful definition of an elder, and this is what I hope we build on as we look at the positives of beginning to bring out and lift up what elders can share and give to us.

“‘An elder is a person who is still growing, still a learner, still with potential, and whose life continues to have within it promise for and connection to the future. An elder is still in pursuit of happiness, and her or his birthright to these remains intact. Moreover, an elder is a person who deserves respect and honor and whose work it is to synthesize wisdom from long life experience and formulate this into a legacy for future generations.’

“Bottom line is, an elder is you and me, and I hope through the White House Conference and other venues that the gifts and the riches and the skills that elders bring to our society will be lifted up in a positive way. Thank you.”

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including those who participated in retirement incentive programs. This may assist school districts in recruiting experienced teachers.

Senate Bill 125, Licensing Medical or Care Facilities.

This bill introduced at the request of the Governor provides for the licensing and regulation of various facilities, including assisted living homes, and requires criminal background checks for certain employees.

House Bill 95, Public Health Disasters/Emergencies.

This rewrite of the public health enabling law requested by the Governor creates new public health powers, including the isolation and quarantine of people with contagious diseases (such as, for example, cruise ship passengers exposed to the Norwalk virus).

House Bill 167, Death Certificate for Deceased Vets.

Sponsored by the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, this bill provides death certificates of deceased veterans without cost.

House Joint Resolution 20, Prostate Cancer Drugs.

This resolution, sponsored by Representative Gatto, urges the U.S. FDA and U.S. Congress to assist in the prompt approval of new drug applications to combat prostate cancer.

Senate Joint Resolution 6, Federal Medical Assistance Reduction.

This resolution introduced by Senate Finance urges the U.S. Congress to take action to prevent the reduction in the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage for Alaska. The so-called "FMAP," the rate at which Alaska is reimbursed by the federal government for Medicaid costs, is slated to decrease from 57.58% to 50% in October of 2005. Such a substantial increase in state Medicaid costs (approximately \$53 million for fiscal year 2006 and \$73 million for fiscal year 2007) could impact the services available to seniors and others.

Successful legislation with the potential to impact seniors negatively included Senate Bill 67, Claims Against Health Care Providers, Senator Seekins's bill which limits the recovery of non-economic damages in medical malpractice lawsuits. Traditionally, older persons are deemed to have significantly lower economic damages because they may have few or no remaining years in the work force. Thus this bill could have a disproportionate impact on seniors who find it necessary to sue over an adverse medical outcome.

And House Bill 141, Public Employee/Teacher Retirement Boards, which creates a defined contribution

retirement plan for new public employees and teachers, was strongly opposed by many senior advocates. The new system, slated to go into effect on July 1, 2006, will offer only private investment accounts to workers, rather than specified ("defined benefit") pensions.

"Though seniors did well in terms of the passage of a number of senior-supportive bills, we have a lot of concern about where we stand in terms of the budget," said Nancy Karacand, the planner who staffs the ACoA's Legislative Advocacy Committee. "For instance, it's unclear what the outcome will be with respect to increased staffing for Pioneer Homes, continuation of the very successful Nursing Facilities Transition program, and funding for the Adult Protective Services General Relief program. Funding for senior grant programs has remained flat for the past ten years while we know that costs of services are increasing and the number of seniors needing services who are not eligible for the Home and Community-Based Care Medicaid Waiver program is growing rapidly."

For more details regarding each bill, visit the Legislature's Bill Action and Status Inquiry System (BASIS) Web site at www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/start.asp.

Older Americans Month Celebrates Long-Term Living

“Celebrate Long-Term Living!” is the national theme for Older Americans Month 2005. The month of May was dedicated to raising the profile of senior citizens throughout the United States. This year, the focus selected by the Administration on Aging (AOA) was intended to honor older Americans as a national treasure, and to highlight the need for mid-life and older persons to be better prepared for living out their golden years. “Older adults and baby boomers need to make thoughtful choices now so they will be more likely to stay healthy, productive, and financially secure in their later years,” said the AOA.

Better planning, better community-based long-term care options, and more consumer-friendly systems are helping more older Americans remain vibrant and independent. Studies have shown that, given the choice, older adults opt to remain in their own homes and communities for as long as possible. AOA says it is proud to sponsor programs that help them do just that: “Using the best science and technology available, as well as the indispensable element of human caring, we are implementing programs that help older persons eat better and move about more, that highlight the positive benefits of civic engagement, and that

redefine aging in our society.

“It’s never too early to begin exploring the options available to you or to a loved one. We urge you to begin planning now for your later years.”

Programs for Alaskan seniors funded by the Administration on Aging through the Older Americans Act include meal programs, transportation, a variety of in-home services, and family caregiver support, as well as programs offering legal assistance and help for older workers.

Alaska Governor Proclaims “Older Americans Month”

Governor Frank Murkowski issued an executive proclamation declaring the month of May 2005 to be “Older Americans Month” in Alaska. The document bears the seal of the State of Alaska and states that:

Alaska is home to more than 64,000 citizens aged 60 years or older.

The number of older Alaskans is increasing every year.

Older Alaskans are members of our community entitled to dignified, independent lives free from fears, myths, and misconceptions about aging.

Each community in America must strive to recognize the contributions of our older citizens, understand and address their evolving needs, and support their caregivers.

Our society is dependent upon intergenerational cooperation and support, and benefits from our collective efforts to serve older Americans and the people who love them.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the passage of the Older Americans Act by the United States Congress.

Now, therefore, I, Frank H.

Murkowski, Governor of the State of Alaska, do hereby proclaim May 2005 as:

Older Americans Month

in Alaska, and encourage citizens to nurture and honor our older Alaskans and celebrate the month of May as Older Americans Month.

Dated: April 28, 2005

[Signed] Frank H. Murkowski,
Governor

Older Workers More Willing Than Young to Accept Change, Says Study

Older workers are more inclined and interested in making changes to benefit the organization than younger workers, says a researcher at Louisiana State University.

Conventional wisdom says that technology is the province of the young and that older workers are negatively affected by constant changes in the computerization of business functions.

These stereotypes about aging employees are simply not true and prevent companies from benefiting from their knowledge and experience, says Dr. Tracey Rizzuto, assistant professor of psychology.

Workers are getting older and

within five years, 20 percent of the workforce will be older than 55, says the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Contrary to common belief, Rizzuto found that older workers exhibited more willingness to learn the new technology than their younger counterparts. "That went against what I had expected," she said, admitting that perhaps she held some stereotypes about older workers. "Sometimes the news is not in the expected, but lies in the unexpected."

Veteran employees were more "fired up" about the changes, Rizzuto observed, adding that most, though not all, were supportive of the new systems.

"While there may be some isolated examples of an older worker being resistant to change, this study suggests that is not typical of most older workers surveyed," she said. Older workers saw the value of the changes and felt an obligation and loyalty to their co-workers to learn and implement the new technology.

She suggested that companies provide specialized training programs for older workers to keep them current with new technological procedures.

"It's a small price to pay to retain a valuable segment of the workforce who are teachable and adaptable and who will greatly benefit the organization," she added.

Director's Voice *(continued from page 5)*

is on building a foundation for increasing mental health services for seniors across the state. The ACoA, the University of Alaska's Geriatric Education Center, the Division of Behavioral Health, Southeast Senior Services and Southcentral Counseling have partnered in developing the grant proposal, which was submitted on May 4, 2005. If awarded, this grant project would begin January 2006.

Staff from the ACOA, the Senior Grants Program under

the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services, and the University of Alaska's Geriatric Education Center have just finished another grant proposal to submit to the U. S. Administration on Aging for a 3-year Alzheimer's Demonstration Grant. The project would target the Southwest Alaska, with Bethel as the hub community. It would begin in the fall of 2005. Some of the funds will be used for direct services.

ACOA staff has been working

with state agencies, providers and other entities to create a better system for finding information and receiving referrals for services.

Although our state is vast and the service system complex, we believe we can do more to improve on this system, and welcome any suggestions that you may have. Please feel free to contact me or any of the ACOA staff if you have any questions, or if you would like to let us know what you think the ACOA should be doing on behalf of older Alaskans.

White House Conference on Aging Moved to December

The White House Conference on Aging (WHCoA) Policy Committee announced on May 19th that it had voted to move the date of the 2005 White House Conference on Aging to December 11–14, 2005. The new location will be announced shortly. The original date of the WHCoA was October 23–26, 2005.

In discussing the date change, WHCoA Executive Director Scott V. Nystrom said, “Due to the overwhelming interest in this decade’s WHCoA, and an extraordinary response from potential exhibitors, it makes sense to move the WHCoA to a larger venue. This change will improve the comfort and overall experience for

our 1,200 delegates to the Conference.”

The White House Conference on Aging is a decennial event intended to produce recommendations for the President and Congress to help guide national policies on aging for the next decade and beyond. “We are entering a bold, new, and exciting era of America’s history—one characterized by an aging population. The 2005 WHCoA will be an excellent opportunity for citizens across the United States to help shape a positive future for all Americans as we enter this new era,” said Dorcas R. Hardy, Chairman of the 2005 WHCoA Policy

Committee. The 2005 WHCoA will address the aging issues of today and tomorrow including the nation’s 78 million baby boomers who will begin to turn 60 in 2006.

Delegates selected by the Governors, Members of Congress and the National Congress of American Indians will be announced soon, and will be notified in the very near future about the WHCoA registration process. Through June 1, 2005, the WHCoA is accepting applications for at-large delegates. For more information about the at-large application process and the 2005 WHCoA, please visit www.whcoa.gov.

Doctors Identify Possible New “Alzheimer’s Gene”

Scientists in Boston have zeroed in on a gene that appears to increase our risk for developing Alzheimer’s disease as we age.

This gene, which scientists label with the initials UBQLN1, makes a protein called ubiquitin 1. This protein has unique actions in the brain and if a mutated form of the protein is present, it may contribute to memory loss and other telltale signs of Alzheimer’s disease.

For example, the protein interacts with two other proteins (“PS1” and “PS2”). In earlier studies by other researchers, PS1 and PS2

mutations have been linked to a rare form of Alzheimer’s that runs in families and strikes at a young age, often when a person is in his or her 30s, 40s or 50s.

The current gene, UBQLN1, appears to increase risk for the far more common form of Alzheimer’s that strikes much later in life, typically in a person’s 60s, 70s, or later.

Several Alzheimer’s genes have been identified, but scientists believe there are more that play a role in the disease.

Just because a person carries the mutated UBQLN1 gene

doesn’t mean he or she will inevitably come down with Alzheimer’s. However, they may be more likely to develop memory impairment than someone who doesn’t have the gene.

Scientists believe that Alzheimer’s results from a complex mix of inborn, genetic factors (nature) and external, environmental influences (nurture). In addition to various genes, non-genetic factors that may increase someone’s risk of developing Alzheimer’s include head trauma at an earlier age, major depression, and high cholesterol. Still, the **(Concluded on page 14.)**

Nerve “Traffic Jam” Marks Early Alzheimer’s

A so-called “traffic jam” in the network of nerves that crisscross the brain may play a role early in the course of Alzheimer’s disease, researchers report. Like cars backed up on a highway, a disruption of nerve signals could impair the free flow of information and materials in the brain and further compromise brain function, scientists speculate, contributing to the progressive memory loss, confusion, and other telltale symptoms of the disease.

Researchers from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute examined mice that had been genetically engineered to develop a disease that resembles Alzheimer’s. They found defects early in the course of the disease, before symptoms of memory loss became apparent. The animals’ “axons,” long structures that are vital for communicating information from one nerve cell to another, became swollen, blocking the movement of proteins and other critical structures vital for proper nerve function. In a vicious cycle, this nerve “traffic

jam” appeared to cause an abnormal protein to build up in the brain, choking off and eventually killing healthy nerve cells.

A similar process may occur in people with Alzheimer’s as well. The researchers examined brain sections taken at autopsy from humans with different stages of Alzheimer’s disease. They detected the same kinds of swelling in those samples that they had seen in the mice. Earlier research has also shown that in people with Alzheimer’s, a toxic substance called beta-amyloid builds up in the brain, forming sticky patches called plaque. The brains of Alzheimer’s victims also become clogged with tangles of proteins called “tau.”

The researchers speculate that nerve “traffic jams” may be one reason why plaques and tangles arise in the brains of those with Alzheimer’s. They theorize that such nerve defects may contribute to certain inherited forms of early-onset Alzheimer’s that strike at a young age. Alzheimer’s disease might

also develop spontaneously in people without a known genetic defect, as the transport machinery in their neurons breaks down with age.

“A person could have a predisposition to the disease, or it could just be that as time progresses, one person could by chance accumulate these blockages more than another,” said study leader Lawrence Goldstein of the University of California in San Diego. “And randomly, some people would accumulate more than others, enough to cross a critical threshold and tip the scale toward disease.”

The scientists emphasize that further research is needed to confirm these findings and to learn more about what goes wrong in the brain during Alzheimer’s disease. Still, the findings could one day lead to new drugs and therapies that help preserve or restore transport between nerve cells in the brain, helping to restore memory and brain function. They may also lead to improved diagnostic tests that may detect Alzheimer’s in its earliest stages.

Alzheimer’s Gene (*continued from page 13*)

cause of Alzheimer’s remains obscure in most cases, and much more research is needed.

The more genetic risk factors for Alzheimer’s that are identified, the more likely it

will be possible to predict those people who are at greatest risk. This research may also lead to new drugs and effective treatments targeting brain defects that cause memory loss and Alzheimer’s.

For more information on the work of the Fisher Center for Alzheimer’s Research Foundation, visit their Web site at www.alzinfo.org/research/.

Events Calendar



The Future of Aging in Alaska, a 2005 White House Conference on Aging community forum for **Fairbanks area** seniors and care providers, will be held on **Friday, June 3rd, 2005** from 1:00 to 4:30 p.m. at the Westmark Fairbanks Hotel, 813 Noble St.

The **9th Annual Brain Awareness Walk** sponsored by the **Kenai Peninsula Brain Injury Support Group** begins at Kenai Central High School on **Saturday, June 4th** at 11:00 a.m. The event aims to create awareness of the many individuals and families who experience the devastating effects of brain injury or impairments every year. (Governor Murkowski has issued a proclamation that June is Traumatic Brain Injury Awareness Month in Alaska.) There will be a barbecue lunch served after the walk. For more information, call the Kenai Peninsula Brain Injury Support Group at 283-5711 or 262-6333.

A **local community forum** to gather ideas for the 2005 White House Conference on Aging will be held at the **Kodiak Senior Center** on **Thursday, June 9th, 2005**. For more information, call Pat Branson at (907) 486-6181.

A training program entitled **Promoting Best Practices in Elder Health**, sponsored by the Alaska Geriatric Education Center, will take place on **June 9th and 10th, 2005** at the **BP Energy Center in Anchorage**. The program will include lectures and workshops on a variety of topics including Alaska Native elders, dementia, depression, and chronic conditions association with aging, and is targeted to health and social service providers who work with older persons and administrators of programs for older persons. For more information, go to www.alaskagec.org, or call Geri Heiner at (907) 264-6256.

The **7th annual Kenai Peninsula Areawide Senior Picnic** happens on **Wednesday, June 22nd, 2005** from noon to 4 p.m. at **Soldotna Creek Park**. A picnic lunch will be provided by area senior centers. There will be entertainment as well as cribbage, pinochle, and dominoes games. All Kenai Peninsula seniors are welcome.

Quality Care – Improving Health Outcomes, the Alaska Geriatric Education Center's 13th Annual Care of the Elderly Conference will be held in **Sitka** on **September 16th and 17th, 2005**. The conference, designed to present an overview of current issues in the care of elders, is for service providers and anyone interested in elder care. For more information, call Jill Hanson at 1-800-478-6653.

The Alaska Commission on Aging holds a business meeting and site visits on the **Kenai Peninsula** on **September 27th, 28th, and 29th, 2005**. Details will be available at a later date.

A **Certified Eden Associate Training for the Northern Region** will be held **October 12th–14th, 2005** in **Fairbanks**. The Alaska Geriatric Education Centers is sponsoring this training opportunity for assisted living providers, nursing facility staff, and university faculty and students. For more information, call Denise Daniello at (907) 456-1380.

The **2005 White House Conference on Aging** will be held in **Washington, DC** **December 11th–14th, 2005**. (This is a change from the original plan to meet in October.) The conference is open to delegates appointed by government officials as well as at-large delegates (see www.whcoa.gov).

Info Bytes and Web Sites



The American Geriatrics Society (AGS) Foundation for Health in Aging has launched "Aging in the Know: Your Gateway to Health and Aging

"Aging in the Know" Site Offers Resource for Patients and Their Doctors

Resources on the Web." Based on the professional education programs of the AGS such as the Geriatric Review Syllabus and Geriatrics at Your Fingertips, this free, comprehensive online resource makes state-of-the-art information on the diseases and disorders of older adults available to the public.

The Web site includes a "What to Ask" series, which lists the questions patients may wish to ask their health care providers when facing a variety of conditions and health care decisions.

Visit the site at www.healthinaging.org/agingintheknow/.

100 Years and Beyond: Centenarians Tell Their Stories

The number of Americans aged 100 and above is growing rapidly. Today, there are about 65,000 centenarians in the U.S., up from 36,000 in 1990. This number is expected to grow to 200,000 within 20 years.

This Web site features

the stories of ten unique Americans born before 1900. Created by the editors of the *Christian Science Monitor*, the site is a collection of word portraits of esteemed elders.

Those interviewed for the project come from both rural and urban backgrounds, but

share a sense of humor, great interest in the here-and-now, a strong work ethic, and a refusal to dwell on past hurts or regrets.

To read about these inspiring individuals, go to www.csmonitor.com/atcsmonitor/specials/centenarians.

Alaskan Seniors: Living Longer, Growing Stronger
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