

Editorial: Keep up the pressure - support vaccination

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More often than not, we use this space to criticize. This time, we'd like to offer our congratulations.

One week ago, 18 Alaska Senators voted in favor of SB169, a measure that will provide vaccines to all Alaska children and to most adults. Alaska will buy vaccines in bulk and sell them to clinics, hospitals and others who administer vaccinations.

Sens. Cathy Giessel and Hollis French should be commended for their sponsorship of this bill, which will benefit all Alaskans.

Patients benefit — they receive vaccines more cheaply. The state benefits — it has a healthy workforce. Children benefit — they are protected from deadly disease.

Now it's up to the Alaska House to ensure this program moves forward.

Vaccination is the most powerful tool in modern public health. It has saved more lives than any other medical innovation since the dawn of history.

Humanity has eliminated smallpox. It has almost eliminated polio. Other diseases will follow, we hope.

But there are problems — not with the vaccines, but with people.

Anti-vaccination campaigns are hurting public health. Ignorance and doubt persist despite the evidence. In the 18th and 19th centuries, there were anti-vaccination riots. In the early 20th century, New York City mustered its police force to break down doors and ensure the vaccination of newly arrived immigrants.

Now, we have people who — either through fear or mistrust of government and big business — refuse to vaccinate themselves or their children.

As a result, long-disappeared illnesses have returned: measles, in New York City and British Columbia; whooping cough, here in Juneau. The consequences of these diseases can be fatal.

That's a high price to pay for ignorance, and that's why we support SB169 and urge the House to pass it as soon as possible.

This bill will not eliminate ignorance. It will not eradicate hesitation. But it will be a good first step.

• Empire editorials are written by the Juneau Empire's editorial board. Members include Publisher Rustan Burton, rustan.burton@juneauempire.com; Director of Audience Abby Lowell, abby.lowell@juneauempire.com; Managing Editor Charles L. Westmoreland, charles.westmoreland@juneauempire.com; and Asst. Editor James Brooks, james.k.brooks@juneauempire.com.