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Sponsor Statement from:

Representative Cathy Munoz

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RELEASED: January 19, 2010

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HB235 - Prof Student Exchange Loan Forgiveness

“An Act relating to professional student exchange program availability and conditions for loan forgiveness.”

Status: PREFILE RELEASED >> (H) EDC : 2009-04-16

Through the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), Alaska residents will be able to attend professional health care programs in dentistry, optometry and pharmacy which are not offered in the State of Alaska. HB 235 establishes a student loan forgiveness program entitlement of 25 percent forgiveness for participants who meet the following criteria: Alaska residency with intent to practice and maintain their license in the State of Alaska. An additional 25 percent loan forgiveness will be offered to participants who, in addition to previous criteria, practice in an underserved area or serve patients who are covered under the medical assistance program.

The WICHE program will resemble the WWAMI (Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, and Idaho) program which has been successful as a collaborative partnership between the University of Washington School of Medicine and the five northwestern states. The purpose of WWAMI is to provide publicly supported medical education to residents of this five state region, and train physicians who will return to practice in their home states.

Alaska communities continually face a decreasing number of health care providers and are seeing an increased trend in the number of retirees in certain professions. This is becoming an increasing concern as the number of underserved areas continue to grow and residents in many communities have to travel out of their communities in order to receive care.

Enticing health care providers to Alaska has been an ongoing challenge. Although our university system is constantly improving and adding more educational opportunities, we still lack many needed medical programs. House Bill 235 creates an incentive for the health care professions of dentistry, optometry, and pharmacy by offering a loan forgiveness program for practicing in Alaska.

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House Majority Press: <http://housemajority.org/spon.php?id=26hb235-241>