

## Rynnieva Moss

---

**From:** Christopher Clark [cgcalaska@yahoo.com]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 11, 2009 8:44 AM  
**To:** Tim Barry; John Bitney; Shannon Devon; Peter Fellman; Linda Hay; Paul Labolle; Karen Lidster; Tom Maher; John Manly; Rynnieva Moss; Jane Pierson; Chris Wyatt  
**Subject:** Daily News editorial: Attracting doctors - Legislature can raise Alaska's stake in competition for docs; Obama right to nix mileage tax

## Attracting doctors

Legislature can raise Alaska's stake in competition for docs

Published: March 10th, 2009 06:54 PM  
Last Modified: March 10th, 2009 06:54 PM

Alaska's shortage of primary care doctors has been described as grim. A study two years ago found **we needed 400 more doctors to provide the same level of care as is available elsewhere in the country**. One result is that few doctors will accept the low rates paid by Medicare, the government insurance for those 65 and older. **It's a horrible situation for Alaska's senior citizens.**

Two bills introduced during this legislative session would help relieve the shortage of doctors and other health care workers, and both are worth passing.

**Senate Bill 18** would increase the number of state-subsidized medical students in each class of the WWAMI program operated through the University of Washington. Alaska WWAMI students spend their first year of study at UAA.

These students offer an excellent return -- according to the Alaska Physician Supply Task Force study in late 2006, half of Alaska WWAMI students end up practicing in the state, and a few WWAMI students from other states join them.

**The state raised the number of Alaska WWAMI students in each class to 20 in 2007.**

**SB 18 would increase the number by a modest amount, to 24.** That's the most UAA can accommodate without incurring expensive overhead costs, said Sen. Bill Wielechowski of Anchorage, the bill's sponsor.

**Adding the four students would cost the state little to no money the first year. But by the fourth year, when we would have an additional 16 Alaska students in med school, the state cost is estimated at \$550,000 per year.**

**A second bill, SB 139 [by Sen. Donny Olson],** calls for the state to pay financial incentives to already-qualified doctors, nurses or other health workers if they take certain jobs in Alaska.

The bill, with a bipartisan group of sponsors, would carry out a plan developed by a group of health care professionals including representatives of the Alaska Primary Care Association and the Alaska State Hospital and Nursing Home Association.

**The state would offer financial incentives to as many as 90 workers, from physicians to nurses, to come work in Alaska.** Those who take hard-to-fill jobs, or treat a share of uninsured patients or those on Medicare or Medicaid, would get priority.

Each person would be guaranteed the incentive for three years as long as they kept working here.

**The state would either repay part of their student loans or, if the health worker didn't have loans, simply pay them directly. The individual payments would range from \$20,000 per year for nurses, physicians assistants and some others, to \$35,000 for doctors, pharmacists and dentists, to \$47,000 for doctors who accept the hardest-to-fill positions.**

**The state's cost for three years' worth of incentives would be \$7.5 million.**

That sum is large enough to cause concern this year, with a big drop in state revenues anticipated.

But consider this: Forty-four of the 50 states already offer financial incentives to lure health workers. Alaska is not competitive for health care jobs, and people are suffering because of it.

**BOTTOM LINE: The Legislature should pass two bills to relieve a critical shortage of health care workers in Alaska.**

---

**Not now**

***Obama right to nix mileage tax***

States and the federal government rightly worry that they'll see less revenue to pay for road work as Americans turn to more fuel-efficient vehicles and future technology takes us further from the internal combustion engine.

**One solution is a mileage tax, whereby vehicles would be equipped with GPS tracking devices and people would be taxed according to the miles they drive rather than the gallons of gasoline they purchase.**

**Oregon has already run a pilot program for such a tax, and a federal mileage tax has gained favor in the Democratic Congress despite the opposition of President Obama.**

Concerns for revenue and how to pay for road building and maintenance are valid. But the mileage tax is the wrong solution, at least for now.

First, a major shift in transportation tax policy shouldn't be done on the fly in the middle of an economic crisis. There are too many unanswered questions. Among them:

- Is the ability to track people's driving one we want governments to have?
- How does such a tax encourage the use of higher-mileage vehicles? Is the owner of a hybrid getting 35 mpg going to pay the same tax as the owner of a gas-guzzling Hummer?
- Do we really want to charge people more for miles driven during rush hours, a premium that's been suggested in some states?

Raise the gasoline tax if necessary, but let's not be talking about a mileage tax until we've done a lot more research.

**BOTTOM LINE: Mileage tax? Maybe down the road. Maybe.**