

Senior Care not a replacement for the Longevity Bonus

Senator Gretchen Guess

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It has been months since the final longevity bonus checks went out to Alaska's seniors. As a result, some seniors aren't able to travel as much, others are struggling with the decision to stay in Alaska or not, and some have to choose between putting food on the table or taking life-saving drugs.

As he promised, after vetoing the longevity bonus, Governor Murkowski did put in a program to help the "neediest" seniors -- until June 2004. I thank him for the Senior Assistance Program. Additionally, this year he has put in his "Senior Care" program to help low-income seniors with the purchase of prescription drugs until the Federal legislation is up and running in 2006.

I am concerned, however, about the misconception Senior Care will replace the elimination of the longevity bonus. Senior Care ends in 2006. If eliminating the longevity bonus (which I did not support) was to better focus our resources on the seniors in the most need, then why does the Senior Care program end? In 2006, the Federal program does not cover all prescriptions for seniors (the area known as the donut hole); so, these seniors may still need prescription aid after the Federal legislation. Additionally, helping these seniors (less than \$16,000/year in income and \$4,000 in liquid assets) is the right thing to do.

Senior Care is a temporary bridge without a blueprint for the future. Alaska's seniors, especially those in the most need, deserve a more permanent foundation.

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