



Alaska State Legislature House and Senate Democrats

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Pioneers Home Resident Vince Doran & Rep. Gara Seek Solution To Growing Vacancy Problem At Pioneers Homes:

Study Confirms 150 Resident Rooms Left Empty By The State In Time Of Affordable Senior Housing Shortage

ANCHORAGE – Today World War II veteran and Pioneers Home resident Vince Doran has joined with Rep. Les Gara to call for a solution to Alaska's policy of leaving significant numbers of Pioneers Home residential rooms empty. A press availability will be conducted in front of the Anchorage Pioneers Home, 923 W. 11th Ave., at 1 p.m.

At the end of 2002, 112 rooms were left empty of residents statewide. By the end of 2003 that number had grown to 158 rooms, according to a study by the Division of Legislative Research Services that was commissioned last session by Rep. Gara. Pioneers' home residents have been faced with substantial rate increases, reduced staff. Since 1996, basic room and board rates have increased from \$934/mo. to \$2,240/mo.

Doran, who was a fighter pilot during World War II, and has resided at the Anchorage Pioneers Home for 7 years, has become increasingly concerned that so many rooms are left empty at a time when the need for affordable senior housing is increasing. "It's not right to waste such a great investment in the community" by not utilizing it, says Doran. He's invited the press to see the empty rooms in order to drive home the point that this is a problem seeking a solution: "People don't understand how many empty rooms there are until they actually see them."

Rep. Gara has also tried to find solutions for this problem. "Our job in Juneau is to solve problems, and not ignore them. This is a real problem, and if we are going to show our seniors the respect they deserve, we'll work together to find a solution." In 2003 Rep. Gara introduced an amendment to add enough staff to fill 20 empty rooms, though the amendment failed along party lines. The research report shows that state funding for Alaska's Pioneers Homes has stagnated the last 2 years, and that it has lagged behind cost of living increases. General Fund and rent receipts totaled \$35.2 million in 2002, and, not including a \$1.4 million increase in federal funds, remains at roughly \$35.5 million this year. The same report also shows the Pioneers Homes have cut more than 30 staff positions between calendar years 2003 and 2004.

Doran and Gara have decided the most productive thing may be to commission the Pioneers Home Advisory Board, or a Task Force led by Board members, to study this problem. The goal would be to propose effective, efficient solutions to this problem. Rep. Gara has written to seek support from the Administration, AARP, Pioneers of Alaska, the Alaska Commission on Aging, and the Pioneers Home Advisory Board and has sent the proposal to leaders of both political parties. Copies of the Legislative Research report (are attached to this file), and are available from Rep. Gara's Office. Please call 269-0106 with any questions. Rep. Gara's office can put you in touch with Vince Doran. Pat Luby, Advocacy Director at AARP, will also be in attendance. ###

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