

• Rep. Tom Brice's Labor Report •

A legislative update regarding Labor issues

Bills of Interest

SB 289 – Board of Technical and Vocational Education

The bill creates a council for the purpose of administering and developing technical and vocational education programs. The council will be empowered to award grants to schools for voc/ed training. These grants will be funded through mandatory deductions from employee wages (2/10 of 1% or 20 cents per \$100 of wages) – sort of a school tax. During the first year of this collection, 76% of the amounts collected, an estimated \$8 million, would be directed toward the university. The funding scheme for this bill is another example of the legislative budgetary shell game. The legislature can now claim they have increased the funding for the university by \$8 million, but, in effect, they have not added a dime. This so called budget increase to the university is all funded by workers, not the State. Opposing this bill is particularly troublesome as it pits the University against voc/ed training. For a strong Alaskan work force they must both be funded. SB 289 has passed out of the Senate Labor and Commerce, and Finance committees, and is in Rules Committee. It could appear on the Senate floor any day.

HB 211— Managed Health Care

This bill would have a dramatic impact on insurance health trusts as the trust or plan would no longer be able to determine what level of coverage they would provide. While HB 211 is sometimes called a "Patient's Bill of Rights" it actually seems to be a full employment plan for doctors – who overwhelmingly support it. The bill would permit doctors to mandate what tests or procedures health trusts or insurance plans must provide. As many physicians never saw a test they didn't like, this is likely to *drive the costs of health care* sky high. HB 211 passed out of the Labor and Commerce and Judiciary committees and referred to the Finance committee. Co-chairs of Finance are Representatives Eldon Mulder and Gene Therriault; the members are Representatives Bunde, Austerman, Davis, Foster, Phillips, Wailliams, Davies, Grussendorf, and Moses. No hearing is scheduled.

SB 256 – Physician Negotiation with Insurance Companies

This bill would permit doctors to join together, jointly set prices, and together bargain with health insurance companies. Current anti-trust laws prohibit this sort of price-fixing. There is little doubt this will increase health care costs for consumers. This bill was passed by the Senate Health and Social Services Committee and is now before the Senate Finance committee. No hearing is pending.

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A copy of any bill may be obtained by request of Rep. Brice or on the web at: <http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis21.htm>.
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