

## Population trends portend changes

In the early '60s, Bob Dylan noted "the times, they are a changing." They were then, they are now.

State demographer Gregory Williams points out in the July issue of *Alaska Economic Trends* three trends in the 1990s that portend big changes for Juneau and Alaska. First, Southeast Alaska's population is growing but growing much more slowly than the Anchorage/Mat-Su region. Second, the number and percentage of older Alaskans spikes dramatically over the next two decades. Third, the number of school-age Alaskans bumps up by nearly 13 percent over the next 20 years.

Because Southeast is growing more slowly than Southcentral, our region will slowly lose political influence in the state legislature. The legislature is reapportioned at the beginning of each decade and we can anticipate a gradual shift in legislative seats to the north.

Because the number of Alaskans 65 and older will nearly triple by 2018 (from nearly 33,000 to over 92,000 or, put another way, from 5.3 percent of the population to almost 12 percent), we can anticipate more demand for private and public services for this rapidly growing segment of the population. It would be a mistake, though, to characterize this change solely as an imposition. Dollars from Social Security, retirement packages, and the investment earnings of this important demographic group help stabilize an Alaska economy now heavily canted toward employment in volatile resource industries.

And, finally, because Alaska's school-age population grows, investment in our most important Alaska resource must grow, also.

*(Alaska Economic Trends is produced by the Alaska Department of Labor and covers statewide economic issues. The July issue also outlines the economy of Skagway. Subscriptions to the publication are available by e-mailing Jo\_Ruby@labor.state.ak.us or by calling 465-6019.)*

## High stakes exit exam ready to go

IT'S THE ULTIMATE "PASS/FAIL" SCHOOL TEST. Alaska's high school exit exam, which applies to the graduating class of 2002, will be given for the first time next spring to high school sophomores. If they don't pass the exam before they graduate in 2002, they won't get a diploma.

Reading, writing, and arithmetic comprise the three elements of the test, and students must pass all three parts of the exam. If they fail one part, they only need to retake that part, and a student has four more chances to take the exam before graduation. The questions are designed to test a student's mastery of a variety of standards. Since the tests are not graded on a curve, every student will need to meet minimum standards to get a diploma.

It's a high stakes game that has everyone nervous. Despite the field testing of exam questions last spring, no one knows for sure how Alaska students will perform. The department remains firm in refusing to release those test results. They say in the field trials last spring only the questions were "tested" for accuracy and bias, not the students. In a state with a high percentage of bi-lingual and bi-cultural students, unbiased questions are particularly important.



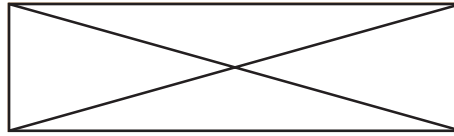
In other states, exit exams have created a stir. Virginia experienced massive failure rates after the first round of testing this spring. Only 2.2% of that state's schools met the performance goals on exams and, as a result, many public schools are in danger of losing their accreditation.

Virginia's situation illustrates some of the inherent problems facing states with exit exams. Under their accountability plan, Virginia created a battery of 27 individual tests over four subject areas (English, math, science and history). They made a serious effort to raise academic standards, and their failure rates show just how serious they were. States which set the bar high risk the same results, but those who don't raise it high enough make a mockery of the whole exit exam process.

Alaska's standards have been praised by the Council on Basic Education and the Education Coalition of the States. When the exam

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# Capitol Undercurrents



## Dog-gone-it!

The continuing saga of bringing pets into legislative offices continues to dog the legislature. At the last meeting of the Legislative Council (the legislature's governing body during the interim), Rep. John Cowdery asked what the dog policy was for the Anchorage legislative offices. Council chair, Sen. Mike Miller, said he was delegating the decision to the legislature's most imposing dog fancier, Rep. Ramona Barnes. When Sen. Tim Kelly wanted asked what her policy would be, Sen. Miller told him to ask her with his tail tucked between his legs.

## Everything you wanted to know, and more

If you're looking for state contracts to bid on, public meetings, pending regulations or any state action requiring public notice, check out the state's new on-line website for public notices. You'll find it on the State of Alaska homepage: [www.state.ak.us](http://www.state.ak.us). You can still find public notices in the newspaper, but the internet gathers everything together and allows you to search for what you want. We've seen the future. . .

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is finally unveiled, Alaskans will undoubtedly debate whether they are too high or not high enough. Teachers in most Alaska districts are well aware of the standards on which the test is based, and are now fine-tuning their curricula to ensure their students pass. If Alaska's results are as disappointing as most other states', we may see an increase in the already alarming number of high school drop-outs. Although the Department of Education is aware of a potential problem, they are just beginning to collect data to monitor the situation.

I don't know what we'll find when sophomores take the test next spring, but I do have a prediction. At the very least, we can expect parents and schools to ask the legislature for more money once the test results are in—money for tutors, smaller class sizes, summer schools and more. The legislature called the tune, but it may come up short when it's time to pay the piper.

## Clueless in Sitka

One Sitka advocate of more state dollars to keep the Sitka airport open for longer hours just didn't get it. The state was reducing hours at the state-owned airport from 20 hours each day to 16 hours because they lost an employee due to budget cuts. In a letter to the governor, the airport advocate noted the harsh economic consequences that accrue to the community if the employee is laid off because of budget cuts. The scribe then added a postscript saying: "I oppose this particular reduction, for the reasons listed above. Spending cuts should be structured as follows: 1) a 10 percent reduction in the number of state employees. . ." The Sitka assembly later voted to pickup the cost of the employee so the airport could remain open 20 hours each day.

## Who says we've got two parties?

*Salon*, the on-line magazine, ran a piece this week excerpting quotations from campaign speeches of Al Gore and George

W. Bush without attribution. Can you tell who said what?

(1) Government can help. We can pass laws to give school and principals more authority to discipline children and protect the peace of classrooms. We must encourage states to reform their juvenile justice laws. We must say to our children, "We love you, but discipline and love go hand in hand, and there will be bad consequences for bad behavior."

(2) I will involve people in after-school programs, maternity group homes, drug treatment, prison ministries. I will lay out specific incentives to encourage an outpouring of giving in America.

(3) Responsible men and women must make their own most personal decisions based on their own consciences, not government interference. No executive action can mend a broken family. No legislation can reconnect a parent to a child, or a family to a grandparent.

3) Gore  
2) Bush  
1) Bush

Answers

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