McConnell woos Murkowski with $2 billion for health care

By Ricardo Alson-Zaldivar

WASHINGTON — A provision in Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell’s rewrite of the health care bill appears to benefit only one state, that’s Alaska, home of one Republican holdout, McConnell badly needs to keep the legislation alive, and her state might gain nearly $2 billion in federal money.

The language would give states with extremely high premiums an added piece of two funds the measure would create that together total $182 billion through 2026. The money is supposed to help insurers meet consumers’ coverage costs. Analysts at the consulting firm Avalere Health estimated the provision would mean $150 million for Alaska in 2018, $230 million in 2019 and $200 million in 2020.

New Senate health care bill could be vulnerable — and that’s just the tip of the iceberg, analysts say. McConnell badly needs to keep the legislation alive, and her state might gain nearly $2 billion in federal money.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

State parks need help

To the Editor: I am writing this letter to urge all Alaskans and surrounding areas that our state parks are in need of support and attention.

The state Department of Natural Resources has been making budget cuts to put all of the state parks in the Delta Region in a place called passable management. No park range has been designated for the season as of July 1. On June 29, notices were posted on all of the campgrounds and they were locked. This closure affects the Richardson Range campground, Quartz Lake campground, historical park at Richardson Road and campground at the Delta Recreation Area site in Delta Junction, the Tomahawk Creek campground and the Fielding Lake campground.

The outcome of the meeting was that the parks will not help the other communities, volunteers from the Delta Historical Society are taking over the campgrounds and the Park service, which works out to an average of 620 hours of community service, which will cover the entire summer for the six weeks of the program.

Thank you for your help in this matter.

Carol Dunlap-Austin

State had big run in oil revenue

By Rep. Adam Wool

We had a good run. This phrase was recently recited in conversation and was one of many things up for many Alaskans. Oil started flowing in the trans-Alaska pipeline on June 29, 1977, and ever since, Alaska has been on a good run. We got rid of our state income tax and our education head tax and started doing something no other state does: giving out individual checks to every man, woman, and child — regardless of length of residency and income level. The first dividend check, in 1980, was $1,000 (which was supposed to cover the first 40 years of our state's existence).

Things have changed significantly since those days. In 1980, the price of oil, adjusted for inflation, was $315 a barrel; the current price is less than $50 per barrel. Peak production of the pipeline was about 10 million barrels a day in 1988, when it was responsible for 25 percent of total U.S. production. Currently, throughput is about 500,000 barrels per day, or less than 1 percent of total U.S. production. Price and production both have been in a long-term decline for many years; the impact of Alaskan oil is now clear.

We have to address this new reality, but as a resident of Fairbanks, I don't really want oil. I don't want oil to be a major part of our economy to attract much-needed revenue. I don't want an income tax — even though the income tax many services, such as auto repair, petrol stations and groceries, was a true revenue source. Alaskans have and continue to witness the negative impact our dependence on oil has had on our economy to attract much-needed revenue.

We need to say to the Legislature, “just go down there and work on it.” It's been a good run, but now it's time to wait. I think now is the time. To continue to cut more services and let our economy falter is unforgivable. This is not the finish line for our state. We need an economic diversification to keep us afloat. I'm happy with our families and our state,” he added. Keynote speaker Nathan McCowen, a member of the Alaska House of Representatives, who now serves as CEO of a Native corporation, spoke of the need to address issues facing communities and the state. He referenced the state’s ongoing budget shortfall and a host of societal problems such as outmigration, overcrowding, domestic violence and mental health. “We need to find a way to address these issues. We’re constantly being asked to do more with less. It's a challenge to maintain the quality of life we’ve always known. As elected leaders, we need to address these challenges and find solutions.”

Let’s work on it, folks! We need to work on it! We can see the problems, let’s work on it, and work our way through it. The Legislature needs to go back to work and do the job that was given to them.

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