

FAIRBANKS
Daily News-Miner

OPINION

“INDEPENDENT IN ALL THINGS ... NEUTRAL IN NONE.”

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UAF speaks up on Native languages

Four-day conference that begins Monday will address ‘linguistic emergency’

News-Miner opinion: Alaska Native languages are in peril. But the University of Alaska Fairbanks College of Rural and Community Development is stepping up to the challenge. Faculty and staff have already put together a conference, called the Alaska Native Language Revitalization Institute, that will begin Monday to tackle the problem.

A report published earlier this year brought much needed attention to the dwindling number of fluent language speakers. Some languages are at greater risk than others. For example, Upper Tanana and Haida have fewer than 10 fluent speakers remaining, while

there are closer to 10,000 speakers of Central Yup'ik. The Alaska Native Language Preservation Advisory Council's report also made a grim prediction that Alaska's 20 indigenous languages would be extinct or dormant by the end of the century if they continue to

decline at the current rate.

On April 28, Alaska legislators passed a concurrent resolution urging Gov. Bill Walker to sign a “linguistic emergency” order to bring attention to this impending disaster. As of Friday, Gov. Walker had not signed the order.

The faculty and staff at the College of Rural and Community Development deserve a round of applause for their quick response. The four-day conference will feature 140 instructors teaching these languages: Yup'ik, Inupiaq, Tlingit, Haida, Gwich'in, Dena'ina, Ahtna, Deg Xinag, Sugpiaq/

Alutiiq and Denaakke'.

Instructors from the University of Hawaii Hilo's College of Hawaiian Language will also offer insight from their own work in revitalizing Hawaiian languages.

Registration is closed, but you can still livestream the Alaska Native Language Revitalization Institute and see the schedule at uaf.edu/rural/anlri.

If you have any interest in learning one of Alaska's indigenous languages, brushing up on a language you already know or want to know more about how you can help, be sure to tune in.

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE

Where are the cranes?

By Alan Gross

A friend recently noted that he hadn't seen cranes on the Anchorage skyline this summer. It's because they are all south in Seattle, Portland, Oregon, Denver, San Francisco and Vancouver. Despite \$70 a barrel oil, increased oil production, Arctic National Wildlife Refuge development on the horizon, and maybe even a new gas line — our economy remains flat with no exciting indicators of impending improvement. What's it going to take to get business to want to come back to Alaska? It's going to take a favorable business environment, and that has to include getting our extremely high health care costs under control. It made me sad to read in the Anchorage Daily News about the teacher leaving our state because of low, noncompetitive wages.

Fortunately, Alaskan teacher benefit packages have become so expensive that the overall per-teacher cost is too prohibitive to allow for any competitive raises in salary. Instead, that money increasingly goes toward maintaining health care packages. Wouldn't we, as parents, rather our teachers spend their limited spare time discussing how to improve Alaskan education rather than fighting to maintain their health benefit packages? Public safety officers, ferry workers and public employees are also caught spending way too much time defending their health benefit packages, which in turn, have compromised their salaries across the Alaska economy.

A robust Alaska economy is going to require more than simply reforming our health care system by making it more affordable, but we can't have one without the other. The state of Alaska should take a balanced approach toward growth. It should be business friendly, with competitive health care costs and tax incentives. The state should continue to encourage aggressive development of oil, gas and other natural resources; promote tourism; and we should also develop alternative energy sources. The state should encourage innovation to create new businesses and take advantage of our geography and climate to develop businesses that would be less expensive to operate here than down south (eg. low temperatures for data storage).

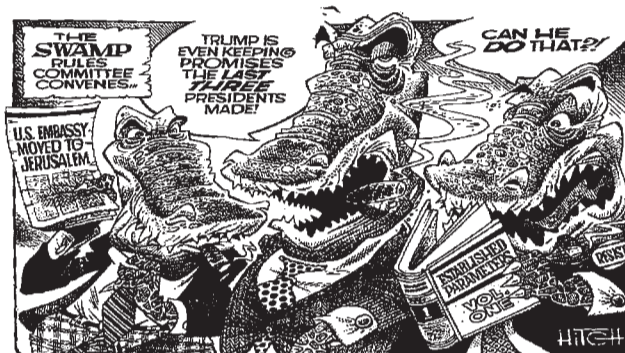
And, we need to accept that climate change is real and be prepared for the changes that come with it. Alaska should be at the forefront of the Arctic. But none of that will come with any gusto unless we make health care more affordable in Alaska.

A number of proposals would reform our nation's health care payment system, but the one that makes the most immediate sense to me, for Alaska, is one that would allow groups (eg. teachers associations and small businesses) or individuals, the option to buy into a Medicaid-like state administered program (call it AKHEALTH). There would be no copays, no out-of-pocket costs, few hassles and still very, very good care. There would be better coordination of care. And providers could, and would, still be reimbursed at very competitive rates. This could be phased in (eventually covering more groups) of more than five or more years as well.

Alaska Medicaid currently costs about \$12,000 per person, per year. Wouldn't you like to be able to buy that instead of what you have? The infrastructure is essentially in place, it would not overly disrupt our existing system, and it would make health care affordable for people considering moving to Alaska. Change is sometimes slow and incremental but I think this would be a great change for our state. I urge our federal delegation to allow states to come up with innovative health plans such as this that address local problems such as ours. Alaska has terrific medical providers and hospitals.

My personal experience of our health care system is that it is first rate. But the payment structure has truly become a nightmare and needs to get fixed. It is very much choking our economy. A number of companies specialize in exporting health care from Alaska because of the high costs here. And good Alaska jobs are indirectly driving south along with them. Wouldn't it be better for our patients and our communities if people were able to stay home for their care? We would all be better off if our care could stay local. And, we just might see a few more cranes on the skyline again.

Alan Gross is a lifelong Alaskan, an orthopedic surgeon and commercial fisherman. He lives in Petersburg and Anchorage.



Dunleavy's brother pumps money into governor's race

Texas resident and financier Francis Dunleavy has now upped his investment in his brother's gubernatorial campaign in Alaska to \$250,000.

Add to that donations from Alaskan Bob Penney of \$175,000, and it is easy to see how Mike Dunleavy — who decries the lack of state leadership — has been able to get so much public notice in the months since he quit his position as a state leader to try to become the leader of the executive branch.

To be clear about this, it is not the official campaign of the former state senator that has collected \$425,000 from two people, but it is “Dunleavy for Alaska,” a so-called “independent” organization set up to take advantage of the giant loopholes in state and federal campaign funding laws.

From outside appearances, “Dunleavy for Alaska” seems identical to “Alaskans for Dunleavy,” but the latter is the official campaign organization, while the former is a shadow campaign free to do almost anything.

The two campaigns are supposed to have nothing to do with each other, but it's easy to repeat the same messages and avoid official contact. Most people will never know that the two campaigns are separate. The websites of the two groups feature the same photo of the candidate's family and their dogs, as well as similar text.

A shadow campaign doesn't have to be authorized, paid for or approved by the candidate to be 100 percent in keeping with what the candidate wants.

As a sign of just how confusing things can get, on Jan. 23 the independent group filed a form with the Alaska Public Offices Commission calling itself “Alaskans for Dunleavy.” The form was later amended to operate as “Dunleavy for Alaska.”

And a \$1,000 donation by Dunleavy for Alaska to Alaskans for Dunleavy was returned to sender April 19. “Dunleavy for Alaska”



Dermot Cole
LOCAL
COLUMNIST

made a big show early this year of promising to spend “whatever it takes” to get Mike elected and that it had pledged of \$560,000. The shadow campaign also boasted that Francis would be a “minority contributor.” The third biggest contributor is Josh Pepper, president of Davis Constructors & Engineers, who has chipped in \$50,000.

“Whatever it takes” so far is largely the work of Francis, Penney and Pepper. Francis gave \$100,000 on April 18, while Penney gave \$25,000 that day, according to the latest reports filed with the Alaska Public Offices Commission.

They have bankrolled “Dunleavy for Alaska” with the buying power that would require more than 1,000 people to give the maximum amount to an official campaign. Direct donations to official campaigns are limited by Alaska law to \$500.

If you have a lot of money, the best way to get the most bang for your buck is to bankroll a shadow campaign.

It helps if you have a rich brother in Texas.

As I've written before, Francis and his background will be an issue in the Dunleavy campaign as the summer progresses.

Francis was a key figure in a scandal that led to JP Morgan Chase & Co. paying a \$410 million settlement five years ago in connection with accusations of manipulating electricity prices in California and the Midwest.

Francis headed the “principal investments unit” for JP Morgan in Houston that developed bidding strategies that the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission claimed amount to unfair manipulation that harmed utilities and consumers.

The company manipulated the bidding system so that utilities had to make inflated payments that benefited JP Morgan from 2010-2012,

FERC said. The commission required the company to pay back \$125 million in unjust profits and pay a civil penalty of \$285 million.

JPMorgan did not admit or deny wrongdoing, FERC said.

A Forbes columnist wrote that JP Morgan had acquired several antiquated power plants after the collapse of Bear Stearns and that Francis, a former Bear Stearns employee, led the team that developed the bid strategies targeted by FERC.

“Said strategies were devised specifically to obtain above-market payments through bids that falsely appear economic to automated systems, sending low-priced bids for wholesale energy and triggering compensation systems that resulted in higher electricity prices for rate payers and nice profits for JP Morgan,” a Forbes columnist wrote in 2013.

Francis retired in 2013, 2¹/₂ months after the settlement. Reuters said he denied wrongdoing. He was not fined or charged.

In 2013, a Los Angeles Times columnist complained about the FERC deal: “What's worse is that even though FERC identified four JPMorgan employees as the perpetrators of the manipulation — Andrew Kittell and John Bartholomew of the bank's Houston-based Principal Investments unit, their supervisor Francis Dunleavy, and his supervisor Blythe Masters, Morgan's commodities mastermind — there's no indication that these individuals will suffer any consequences for this rip-off.”

With Francis Dunleavy as a major financial player in the Alaska governor's race, his actions in the electricity markets and the FERC settlement ought to be addressed by brother Mike. It won't be enough for Mike to say he has no connection with the shadow campaign.

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