

Alcohol Education needed in School

By GORDON JACKSON

Absent in the Governor's alcoholism package of proposed legislation to attack our number one health problem is the development and implementation of an alcoholism curriculum to be taught in our rural schools. This idea was recommended at the December Citizen Participation Conference and Rural CAP State Board Meeting.

The idea makes a lot of good sense. We spend millions on rehabilitation and sleep-off centers. These activities are "after the fact." Why not inform them of the negative effects of alcohol while our children are in school? We did this to attack other diseases. For instance, dental health. Years ago the Indian Health Service spent millions filling cavities and treating mere symptoms. When they began teaching preventive measures and dental health, the amount of cavities dropped significantly. The same was true with Tuberculosis. Preventive measures were taught and the disease is just a memory today.

In rural Alaska "Alcohol" is identified as the key to a "good time." While growing up, I heard many relatives state while drinking what a "good time" they were having. Any holiday or big event always had to have "alcohol" and therefore became the number one recreational outlet and ironically the number one problem. Young adults experiencing these events and having the comments identified with this and couldn't wait to have a "good time." So what did they do? They "sneaked" before the age of majority to experience the good time and recreation. It probably escalated when the age of majority was reached due to public pressure.

I personally believe if there was a curriculum developed to explain alcohol and its negative effects, and were taught in the rural schools along with some other recreational outlets, alcoholism as a disease would begin to drop in rural Alaska. After all, all bad habits are learned, not inherited. If we learned early what "Alcoholism" can potentially do, as we do with biology, arithmetic, law, science, culture, and others we can make an informed decision, and not merely identify with the way it's always been.

The Governor and legislature needs to take another look at his alcoholism package and make room for preventative measures such as alcoholism curriculum and more recreational dollars for rural communities.