

# Positive results stem from alcohol-ban in Barrow

Everybody is watching Barrow fight alcohol petition, violent crime drops

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## The History

In 1969, Barrow voted to go completely "wet", allowing the importation and sale of alcohol, after being a "dry" community. The Barrow City Council, upon assuring everybody at a meeting that the proceeds from alcohol sales would go towards the betterment of the community, formed a non-profit corporation known as Barrow Liquor Sales, Inc., and that only one application would be forwarded to the Alcohol Beverage

Control Board - that of the City. The vote was 155 for, 135 against. But the City council meeting and subsequent vote

were later deemed illegal because a petition had not been submitted to the Council prior to the Council's decision to hold the election. The election results were declared invalid and Barrow's status reverted to "dry" in February of 1971.

In 1974, under a new state law which said that a community liquor license could be issued, an application for a Beverage Dispensary license was received by the ABC Board for a hotel-motel license to be located in the City of Barrow, called

the Okpik Lounge. The ABC approved the license in September of 1974.

But in October 1975, the City of Barrow held a general election in which the "wet" or "dry" status of the community was considered. The community opted for the "dry" status and by January 1, 1976, Barrow was liquor-free.

In October 1976, the issue appeared again, and the residents voted the City to be "wet". A liquor license was applied for by the City and approved in 1977. Another application was received by the ABC Board by private individuals, which the City

protested. The matter was brought to a hearing, but before the hearing officer could

make a decision, the City of Barrow voted "dry" again in October of 1977.

Another change in the City's status occurred in 1980 when 'Proposition A' appeared on the ballot: "Shall the sale and importation of alcoholic beverages be prohibited in the City of Barrow?" The residents voted "no".

The "damp" status was in effect until October 1994, when the residents voted 622 for and 601 against the sale and importation of liquor, and 614 for and 607 against the possession of liquor. This new "dry" status

has caused ripples across the state.

## What's Happening Now

In 1995, the story is different. City residents are divided, the majority of the Natives, including the elders, are backing City Mayor Don Long in his struggle to keep Barrow "dry". The results to date have been positive - public safety is a reality, medical emergencies are down, and school attendance is up, just to name a few positive impacts.

The local option to be "dry" means that it is illegal for the importation, possession or sale of any liquor in a community that has opted for that status.

But there's opposition. The Freedom Committee, which is comprised of individuals opposing the "dry" status, claims that Long has violated the law in vetoing a petition to put the vote back to the people. Despite this effort, Long feels some of the people who originally supported the Freedom Committee have had a change of heart, now saying the prohibition is good.

## The Plaintiffs

The Freedom Committee has filed a lawsuit against Long in his capacity as city mayor and against Carolyn Edwards, the city clerk, for violating their right to vote by vetoing a petition filed by the committee, for not holding an election after the petition was filed, and demanding that an election be held immediately or within 75 days from the filing. The plaintiffs are Jan Phillips, Scott Ownbey, Tom Nicolos, Sally Lemen, Kathleen Krug,



Photo by Ray Solomon

Barrow City Mayor Don Long has his work cut out for him as he struggles to keep Barrow in the "dry" status.

Robert Myres, Jim Brooks, Mark Hamlin, Terry Burrows, and Nancy Nicolos.

A hearing was held February 23, 1995, taking testimony from both sides.

"I think we had a more compelling presentation," said Long. "We said that the vote should wait a little longer."

Both sides had 5 days to forward any additional information to the court and a decision would be made about a week from now.

Long says that the Freedom Committee is more concerned about their right to vote than the actual effect the ban has had on Barrow.

"They don't want to go one year

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without it (alcohol), claiming that I violated their constitutional right to vote. To me, that's a lame excuse. They're going to get a chance to vote, it's just a matter of when," said Long.

"They're (Freedom Committee) only claiming their constitutional rights have been denied by not voting. They don't care that Barrow has become a better place to live in. These are people that are residents in the state of Alaska and City of Barrow. (But) we all know they are temporary people just to work here," continued Long. "It's taking time away from some of the other things we should be doing."

### **The Statistics**

After one month since the implementation of the total ban, the NSB Public Safety Department released response activity results.

In November 1993, 1224 activities were reported, compared to 588 activities for 1994, a decrease of 53.5 percent. The substance related cases which include alcohol numbered 220 in November 1993 as compared to 32 in 1994, a decrease of 85.5 percent.

Public intoxication is all but non-existent and all types of violence and disorder has decreased dramatically, according a December 1994 press release. "It is apparent that the citizens of Barrow intend to abide by the ban and make it work as intended."

Some of the decreases seen over a

month to month period of October 94 through November 1994 were in: felony assaults - decreased to 0; misdemeanor assaults went from 20 to 3; domestic dispute dropped from 28 to 8; minor consuming alcohol dropped from 12 to 3; driving while intoxicated went from 14 to 2; detoxification from 22 to 3; removal of intoxicated person from 88 to 18; and from 3 fights to 0.

### **Getting Support**

"We're getting very, very high support from the community. As a matter of act, the community members attempted to intervene, but the judge denied their intervention based on the fact that this is a legal question," said Long who feels that even if an election were to happen in the near future, the community would again vote to go dry.

"I don't think that there are any organizations in Barrow with the exception of the Freedom Committee that are against Barrow being dry," said Long. "I've got verbal support from the surrounding communities, public safety, health associations, and councils; they endorse what the City of Barrow is doing. Outlying communities have seen a decrease in criminal and violent activities compared to the prior status."

Mike Bergt, president of MarkAir and MarkAir Express said in a press release that the two airlines are not

entering the political debate surround the bans. Instead, they recognize the seriousness of the situations which led to the bans, and will fully comply as long as they are in effect.

"MarkAir and MarkAir Express would like to commend the foresight and awareness of the village elders, and support local laws banning importation," Bergt said.

MarkAir has prohibited alcohol as cargo, checked baggage or carry-on items which are out of compliance with local ordinances. They also stow liquor carts and routinely seal and lock them while the aircraft are on the ground.

Ed Ward, director of the North Slope Borough's Public Safety Department had wondered if Don Long would ever be able to pull this off.

"I'm very happy that Don had the strength to do this. We (Public Safety) have seen the tremendous impact the ban has had on our department. We are able to get work done," said Ward.

### **The Consequences of Going to Vote**

One thing Long wants people to know is that if the decision is overturned, there would not be the option of going back to a "damp" status for at least a year, and that Barrow would be full-fledged "wet". The same question that was voted on last October would be put before the voters at the next election.

Long said that The Freedom Committee is aware of that stipulation.

"What the Freedom Committee said in response is that another petition could be drawn up. But the law would prohibit that," said Long. "The ABC board wouldn't have to issue a license, but by the same token anyone who wants to order liquor to bring to Barrow would be free to do so. (They would) bootleg it without a license."

### **Who's Concerned?**

"Both Kotzebue and Bethel are watching what's happening here in Barrow," said Long. "They like what they see in relationship with the decrease in criminal activities, the reduction in public safety and health problems. The total overall benefits are good."

"Even the school kids' attendance has increased because they don't have to live through the party activities that went on through the night. It has effected every activity in this community."

"There's other major activities like the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission's Convention three weeks ago," said Long. "A lot of people were shocked to see such a positive change in Barrow."

### **The Condition**

"When Barrow voted to go dry, it became a condition, it's not a right, a condition," said Long. "It's just like

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when you come to Barrow, you're not allowed to have loud music after ten o'clock, kids got to be home by 9:30 p.m. because of curfew, you can't drive over 35 mph, and you can't have any liquor in Barrow. It's just a condition."

"Initially, I knew prohibition

wouldn't work," said Long. "But I changed it so the community could try it out. We've tried everything else. We've spent millions of dollars on facilities to take care of the problems caused by drug and alcohol abuse. My frame of mind was, 'this was one thing we have not tried yet.' That goes along with my veto to give it more time."

