

# Gravel's TT Report

By Mike Gravel  
U.S. Senator, Alaska

Late last month, the United States Senate passed a very crucial piece of legislation: The "Comprehensive Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Prevention, Treatment, and Rehabilitation Act of 1974." Don't be scared by the long title — really, what the bill does is provide federal assistance to combat alcoholism.

## IMPORTANT TO ALASKA

Alcoholism is a major threat among Alaskans — our rate is far above the national average, with at least 20,000 Alaskans labeled as alcohol abusers.

It's difficult to determine the actual number of Alaskans stricken with this disease. There's no clear dividing line between the heavy user and the confirmed alcoholic.

## ALCOHOL-RELATED TRAFFIC DEATHS IN OUR STATE

One good indication, though, can be found in the number of deaths on our highways that involve drinking. In Alaska, most of our traffic fatalities can be attributed to drunkenness.

Look at Anchorage. About 80% of the auto deaths in our city were alcohol related. In Fairbanks, the rate is even more amazing — close to 100%!

## ONE CAUSE: BOREDOM

One reason why the rate of alcoholism is so high in Alaska is our weather and our scattered population.

During those long winter months, living out in the bush can become a pretty tedious thing. Some resort to liquor to get through the cold days. All too often, the results are fatal.

## HUMAN TRAGEDY

Nationally, alcoholism takes a heavy toll. About 9 million Americans are alcohol abusers! But these 9 million victims, in turn, affect the lives of 40 million others, including their own children.

The human suffering is terrible. Probably half of the killings in the country are alcohol-related; one-third of the suicides occur after a drinking bout.

The highway toll is staggering — about half the nation's traffic deaths are alcohol-related, costing about 25,000 lives every year!

## NON-SELECTIVE DISEASE

Alcoholism is an "across the board" disease, striking rich and poor, Native and white, alike. One proven weapon, though, is alcohol education.

## EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY-BASED TREATMENT

The Senate alcoholism bill, places a strong emphasis on education. The bill would authorize \$175 million for education and counseling and would set up a national Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration.

The approach which we adopted on this measure is community-based. It would permit \$200 million in direct Federal aid to community programs and to states which treat alcoholism as a community problem.

Under this legislation, which I co-sponsored along with Senator Hughes of Iowa, Senator Kennedy of Massachusetts, and 22 other Senators, Alaska's share of federal funds could amount to as much as \$300,000.

## REHABILITATION PROGRAMS

This bill meets the alcohol problem by developing methods for prevention and treatment rather than the usual "lock 'em up" approach. Jail terms without treatment are practically worthless.

To make sure that treatment is available, the bill states that alcoholics "shall not be discriminated against" in hospital admissions or treatment.

## SENATE PASSAGE, HOUSE AND PRESIDENTIAL ACTION AWAITED

The Senate has already agreed on the measure. The House of Representatives will, I predict, pass the bill overwhelmingly.

That leaves it up to the President.

Despite the fact that White House spokesmen testified against the bill last year, I honestly cannot see any justifiable grounds for continued Presidential opposition. Human lives are at stake here.

Perhaps Mr. Nixon's opposition will soften, once he realizes the need for this measure and the bipartisan support that it received in the Senate.

As a cosponsor of this bill, I strongly support it as a sign of a total commitment by the government to attack a long-neglected, often misunderstood problem.