

Bootlegging continues to be an important issue

by Eileen P. MacLean
for the Tundra Times

JUNEAU — The issue of bootlegging has been a concern of the rural areas, especially its impact on the life, safety and health of people who are affected by bootlegging activity.

Many concerns are continually raised on this issue at local, rural regional and statewide meetings or conferences. In 1988, the statutes were changed to increase penalties in local option areas. The statutes currently provide that bootlegging is a Class A misdemeanor in those communities which have not held a local option election, and so, hold no liquor license issued by the Alcohol Beverage Control Board.

However, within areas that have adopted local option laws, bootlegging carries a penalty of a Class C felony which carries a maximum \$50,000 fine and up to five years in jail for a first offense.

For example, if a person over the age of 18 is caught and convicted of selling liquor just once, this person could receive a penalty of five years in jail. The severity of this penalty is something we should be concerned about because there is no clear delineation between an individual who is a first time bootlegger and an individual who has a prior record of bootlegging.

Sixty communities in the state have voted to ban the sale and importation of alcoholic beverages and have gone "dry."

Of those 60 communities, 11 are in District 22 (Ambler, Buckland, Deering, Kiana, Kivalina, Noatak, Noorvik, Point Lay, Selawik, Shungnak and Wainwright). In addition, 19 other "dry" communities have voted to ban possession and personal consumption of alcoholic beverages in their communities. Of those, three are in District 22 (Anaktuvuk Pass, Point Hope and Nuiqsut).

Further, seven communities statewide have gone "damp," banning the sale of alcoholic beverages but legally allowing importation and personal consumption, which cannot exceed the quantity specified by law — Barrow, Kotzebue, Bethel, Hushia, Hiamna, Nondalton and Port Alexander.

Bootlegging in these communities is a serious offense. Despite the positive changes many communities have experienced from exercising their local option laws, many are still facing serious problems caused by bootlegging and home brewing.

Sen. John Binkley, R-Bethel, has introduced legislation that would clarify the wording of ballots used to let municipalities and villages decide whether they want alcoholic beverages. The bill would require more common wording on so-called "local option" ballots.

For example, the term "beverage dispensary" would become a "bar" and a "package store" would be referred to as a "liquor store."

One especially important provision of Senate Bill 297 would allow the ballots to be in Native languages in addition to English and restrict the ballots to just one local option issue per election. Senate Bill 297 passed the Senate recently and is now making its way through the House committees.

Welfare reform

House Bill 171, an act establishing a training and education program to expand employment opportunities for individuals needing assistance currently resides in the House Health Education and Social Services Committee, where action to pass the bill out of

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committee is expected.

This is the enacting state legislation required by federal changes in the Welfare Reform Act.

I support the expansion of Adult Basic Education Programs, under the Job Opportunity and Basic Skills Program of welfare reform, as these programs provide people in rural Alaska incentives, opportunities and necessary services for employment, training and more participation in their communities.

The JOBS program will provide educational activities, including high school or equivalent education combined with job training as needed, basic and remedial education to achieve a basic literacy level, education of individuals with limited English proficiency and career training through post-secondary education.

I will be closely tracking this bill as it moves through the House committees.