

Alaska Senate increases tax on alcohol

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Alaskans drink far more alcohol than the average American, and probably consume more alcohol per person than residents of any other state.

Though Alaska is statistically only fourth in the nation for per capita alcohol consumption, almost all drinking is by residents. We follow Washington, D.C., where most of the drinkers live in surrounding suburbs of Maryland and Virginia; Nevada, which caters to tourists; and Vermont and New Hampshire, which do a lot of business with Massachusetts residents who cross the border for less heavily taxed alcohol.

The rate of increase in the national annual average consumption of alcohol between 1958-1975 climbed by 46 per cent; for Alaskans it jumped 80 per cent. Deaths due to alcoholism in Alaska are four times higher than the national rate.

Gov. Jay Hammond identified alcoholism as the Number One health problem in Alaska. Yet Hammond told the 1979 legislature that no programs for alcohol or drug abuse will be established or expanded unless budget adjustments are made or taxes on alcohol are increased.

"That one industry has been allowed a free ride since the early sixties, says Sue Greene, deputy commissioner of the Department of Administration and former liaison with the Department of Health and Social Services for Hammond. "That was the last time there was any tax increase on the liquor industry and the governor feels we must do something to force our facing that."

Hammond introduced a bill that would give an additional \$1.5 million to alcohol-related programs, but if the legislature fails to approve an increased tax on alcohol, the supplemental funding has little chance.

The appropriation and com-

panion tax package were okayed by the Senate this past week, leaving final approval to the House. Last year the House failed to act on a similar excise tax passed by the Senate.

The proposed taxation would increase the tax on beer from 25 cents per gallon to 27½ cents. Taxation on a gallon of wine would jump 50 per cent, from 60 cents to 90 cents; while taxes on hard liquor would be boosted from \$4.00 per gallon to \$5.75.

If the package becomes law it's expected that \$10 million dollars will be raised next year, compared to a projected \$7.6 million under current law, according to Sen. Glenn Hack-

larly for counselors in rural communities; and \$25,000 should be earmarked to help employees with drinking problems.

"I was very impressed by the work they did," said Hackney of the CPC. "It seems to me that rural Alaska is in the forefront in the fight against alcohol."

While the growth of alcohol and drug abuse programs could be stilted without support from increased tax revenues, grants to present programs still would be upped.

According to Sen. John Sackett (R-Galena), chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, all alcoholism and drug abuse programs funded in 1979 will receive at least their present budget plus an inflation allowance for 1980.

The House Finance Committee tentatively approved the governor's budget submission of \$2.6 million for alcohol abuse grants and nearly \$1 million for drug abuse allocations. Sackett said he anticipated "no major changes" in the funding requests when they are considered in the Senate Finance committee.

While dozens of Alaskans from around the state packed both House and Senate HESS committee rooms in March to push for full funding for alcohol related programs, another Hammond bill appears to be key

issue for the homegrown lobbyists.

That measure would substantially revise the state statute that regulates the use of alcohol, and has the support of CPC delegates. Those changes, which would have a major effect on bush communities, include:

- A new class of license which could be adopted by any community. The license holder could sell no more than 2.4 gallons a day to any one customer and orders would have to be placed two weeks in advance.

- Liquor could not be sold if it had been ordered from a dry community.

- The state would reimburse communities that suffer a tax shortfall resulting from prohibition or limitation of alcohol sales.

- Only manufacturers and wholesalers could advertise liquor in Alaska print and broadcast media.

- Bootlegging would become a felony with a possible \$30,000 fine and loss of any vehicle used to transport the illegal booze.

- Sen. Bill Ray (D-Juneau), a former retail liquor store owner, chairs a legislative committee that will conduct hearings this summer in bush communities on how state law can be improved so that it's more responsive to the needs of communities battling the alcohol problem.

This story was told by Mathew Brown Sr., director of the Kake alcohol and drug program, during his recent testimony before the Senate Health, Education, and Social Services (HESS) Committee:

There is a story of a man-eating giant a long time ago. He lived in the mountains, in back of the Indian villages. Each time hunting parties went near the mountain the giant would take on men. This went on for awhile until the men were afraid to go hunting or near the mountain.

The chief, being proud, honest, and brave, said to his tribe, "we have to do something because it is making us afraid - afraid, when we never knew the word 'afraid'. We are losing our pride, which our great forefathers gave and taught us. Let us talk about what we can do to stop this giant."

So, the chief and his tribe sat down and decided that they would all go at once to kill the giant. Each man would take many arrows. When they got near the mountain the giant came to get yet another man.

When this happened, the chief ordered all the men to shoot their arrows at the giant. This made the giant mad, so he began to fight back very hard. But the harder he fought the more arrows came at him. Finally the arrows were too much for the giant and the giant fell and was killed.

A giant has come to Alaska and is taking proud, honest men, one at a time. At first it was hardly noticeable, but now it is very plain to see. A meeting was called to see what could be done about the man-eating giant. That giant is alcohol.

ney (R-Fairbanks) chairman of Senate HESS committee.

When the Citizens Participation Conference (CPC), sponsored by RurAL CAP, met in Juneau in early March, members of a workshop on alcoholism outlined funding priorities for the additional \$1.5 million. About \$1 million will be funneled to Anchorage.

According to the workshop report, \$518,000 should be used for alcohol abuse education in school; \$613,000 would be pumped into new and expanded programs; \$250,000 would pay for manpower training, particu-