

RurAL CAP Deplores 'insult' from Committee

"Be it resolved that the Board of Directors of the Rural Alaska Community Action Program does hereby express its dismay at the irresponsible conduct of the Special Committee on Alcohol and Alcohol-Related Legislation, whose activities demonstrate a total lack of sensitivity to the urgency of the problems they are charged to address and a similar lack of commitment to approaching those problems in a responsible manner..."

Firing away from their board meeting in Kodiak last week,

RurAL CAP directors expressed dismay that the Special Committee on Alcoholism is holding bush hearings on critical alcohol legislation without enough advance notice or information.

"That, in my mind and the mind of the board, is going to be an insult to the rural areas," according to Phil Smith, RurAL CAP executive director.

The committee is reviewing a package of bills proposed by Gov. Jay Hammond to combat alcoholism. The package, 12 bills in all, was introduced last

spring. Only two were enacted.

In a recent press release, Hammond urged rural Alaskans to testify before the committee:

"I mention each hearing location because I am concerned that many Alaskans may not even be aware that the hearings are taking place. I am confident that action will be taken this session if the people demand it."

RurAL CAP not only complained that people were unaware of the hearings, but suggested that the schedule for the

committee, hearings in 17 towns in five days, was so hasty that the committee could not possibly give the legislation the hearing it deserves.

The undated hearing announcement issued by the committee from its Anchorage office listed the communities and the dates they were to be visited, but not the times or specific locations of the sessions.

A member of the committee staff who was involved in preparing the committee's itinerary

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RurAL CAP blasts committee . . .

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admitted that the schedule had changed several times since the committee first announced hearings "two or three weeks ago." She added, "Indications are that the turnout has been good. The committee has been well received."

During the last legislative session Hammond introduced a number of major bills attempting to deal with the alcohol abuse problems:

--increasing the alcohol excise tax to help fund alcohol related state costs;

--tying the increases in the alcohol excise tax to the consumer price index to ensure it keeps up with inflation. (To date the tax has remained at the same dollar amount per gallon since 1961.)

--providing local communities, particularly in rural Alaska, additional legal recourse to cope with often unique and severe alcohol problems;

--allowing local communities local control over the use, sale or if they choose regulation of

prohibition of alcohol within their area;

--asking for \$1.5 million for expanded alcohol abuse prevention and treatment programs.

The hearing schedule was as follows:

Friday, Sept. 16--Anchorage and McGrath.

Saturday, Sept. 17--Ruby, Galena, Nulato, Anvik and Holy Cross.

Sunday, Sept. 18--Hooper Bay, Akiachuk, Napaskiak and Bethel.

Monday, Sept. 19--Nome, Unalakleet, Kotzebue.

Tuesday, Sept. 20--Kiana, Fort Yukon and Fairbanks.

Members of the Special Committee on Alcohol and Alcohol-Related Legislation are: Sen. Mike Colletta, Anchorage (Chairman); Sen. Glenn Hackney, Fairbanks; Sen. Frank Ferguson, Kotzebue; Sen. Bill Ray, Juneau; Sen. Robert Ziegler, Ketchikan; and Rep. Kris Lethin, Anchorage.

Only two members, Colletta and Hackney, have made the entire trip.