

House passes bill to allow alcohol ban in Bush villages

Tundra Times staff

The House has passed a bill that would allow Bush residents to ban the possession of alcohol in rural villages.

The bill was introduced after a six-member Joint Special Committee on Local Option Laws toured the Bush to investigate the problem of alcohol abuse in Alaska's rural villages. The Joint Committee was composed of Rep. John Binkley, R-Bethel; Sen. John Sackett, R-Ruby; Sen. Vic Fischer, D-Anchorage; Rep. John Sund, D-Ketchikan; Sen. Edna DeVries, R-Palmer; and Rep. Katie Hurley, D-Wasilla.

Rep. Binkley, chairman of the special committee, spoke in favor of the bill before the House prior to the vote: "Some of you may say it's an extreme step, that this is going too far.

"I agree it is an extreme step, but sometimes the problem is so extreme and so destructive that extreme steps are necessary."

The ban would cover an area five miles in diameter around villages with no municipal government, and would be in effect inside city limits in incor-

porated communities. Residents of villages would get to decide whether or not to institute the ban by referendum.

Many villages already have local ordinances banning the sale and importation of alcohol; the additional measure of allowing villagers to ban possession is seen by many as an additional and necessary tool in their fight against alcoholism.

Under the provisions of the bill, possession of alcohol would not be a criminal offense, but an infraction punishable by fines of up to \$1,000. Offenders would be able to pay off their fines by rendering community service, valued at \$5 an hour.

The bill passed the House by a vote of 38-2. The bill now goes to the Senate. Its chances of passage are rated good by Max Gifford, administrative assistant to Sen. Sackett.

If the Senate passes the bill before the close of the session, and the governor signs it into law, special elections could be arranged soon afterwards for voter approval of the ban in individual villages.