

Bethel voters to decide fate of alcohol sale 6th vote in 2 years

by Geoff Kennedy
for the Tundra Times

BETHEL — Another year, another local option election in Bethel.

The city's voters once again on Tuesday will decide what the community of 4,390 should do about alcohol abuse.

This time voters consider whether to prohibit the sale and importation of alcohol here.

The election is the sixth in a little more than two years.

Last year, voters turned down a proposal to allow restaurants and liquor stores to sell alcohol.

In 1988, Bethel residents voted on

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four different proposals in four separate elections. They turned down proposals to ban alcohol and to allow liquor to be sold in bars, liquor stores, restaurants and in fraternal organizations.

The four elections in 1988 and the one last year all achieved the same result: Bethel remains a "damp" community. Citizens refused to go "wet," allowing liquor to be sold as freely as in Anchorage, Fairbanks or Nome; but they also refused to go "dry," forbidding people to bring alcohol into the community.

Bethel City Council candidate Antone Anvil led the campaign to go "dry." He believes he has a chance of succeeding, because, he says, previous ballots were misleading.

"There was a lot of elderly people that misunderstood or didn't understand the wording on the ballot," he said. "To vote on it has been complicated for them to understand. So a

lot of elderly people had voted against their will."

Bethel City Manager Mark Earnest agreed.

"Even for English-speaking college graduates, it's still confusing," he said. "Basically, you had a double negative on the ballot last year."

Earnest says the city has printed this year's ballot in English, but will provide Yup'ik explanations at the city's three polling places.

That, Anvil says, may make Yup'ik elders' votes count.

"If it's explained right, I think they'll understand which way to vote. I had to read several times the one they had before. Even Sen. John Binkley, R-Bethel, told me he had to read it over and over several times to get it into his head," he said.

Despite the fact that voters were nearly two to one against going dry in 1988, Anvil remains cautiously optimistic. He refused to predict which way the election will go, but he believes it will be close.