

*Other Voices—*

# Subject of Fairbanks Alcoholism Program

The action taken by the City Council of Fairbanks in drastically cutting the Alcohol Program (Alcohol Rehab Center and counseling) and not funding it after June is typical of the antiquated and provincial thinking that has prevailed in local governments up to this point in time. Formerly, most local governments provided services only to those persons who had the ability of paying for these services, and no allowances were made to assist those individuals who needed the services just as desperately but, because of reasons beyond their control, could not afford to pay the costs. Slowly, through time, governments, at different levels, have broadened their views as to their responsibilities and, in many cases, we have elected persons who have demonstrated those qualities which show that they care about people.

The city of Fairbanks was actually expanding their services provided to the citizens when they created a Department of Health and Social Services. Instead of the usual services provided of parking places, electricity, and police protection, due to the creation of Title IV and the fact that the city did not have to contribute any money except in-kind services, certain services, such as the administration of the Alcohol Rehab Center on Airport Road and supplementary counseling services, were being offered.

These newer services were and are of great need, especially in Fairbanks. Being a service center for the entire Northern Region of Alaska and being on the fringe of a vast rural area, Fairbanks, with its "pioneer" flavor, draws all elements of the life that exists in this northern region. And in doing so, without question, has a large population of alcoholics and problem drinkers. Many of these persons are our Native people and this is why we should be concerned as to the actions taken by the City Council in eliminating totally the Alcohol Program.

Statistics, from city records, have shown that nearly 80 per cent of the arrests made in the past years in alcohol related charges have been Native people. Additionally, 85 per cent of the patients that have gone through the Rehab Center are Native people. Without question, alcohol is one of the major problems facing the Native people, and because it is the one problem that has caused our people so much in terms of employment, status, and family problems, we must take a direct interest in seeing that there are existing programs which can be of assistance in combatting this troublesome element.

The city of Fairbanks should continue the Rehab Center, as a social service such as this should be one of the functions that a local government provides to ALL of their residents. Programs should not have to continuously be provided by the state or federal governments, especially to one particular group because the incidence is higher in that one group, but to all people because when you provide services on the local level you have more grass roots participation, administration which is less inflexible to the needs of the people, and therefore more control as to its direction. If the direction is wrong and the administration is bad, then it is much easier to change that direction on the local level than continuous waiting for "Juneau" or "Washington, D.C." to make the obvious change.

Assistance to people who have problems with alcohol is a necessity in Fairbanks, otherwise, we continue with small town syndrome and outlook of duties, life and objectives. Services should be expanded to meet the needs of all people within a community.

— JOHN SACKETT