

SCOMM

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Partial Transcript
Mc Grook meeting
Sept 16

MIKE COLLETTA:

My name is Mike Colletta, Senator of the Anchorage area and Chairman of the Special Senate Committee on Alcohol and Alcoholism. On my left is Senator Glen Hackney, a member of the committee and Chairman of Health and Social Services Committee in the Senate in the Fairbanks area. These are the only two committee members - - the other three for varied reasons were unable to attend and many of them will take this up on different segments of our hearing tour. Accompanying us, though, is Commissioner Frank Williamson, the Department of Health and Social Services. Mr. Pat Sharrock, Director of the ABC Board and Mr. Richard Peters, the Attorney General's Office. The purpose of our hearings, if, in fact, we wish to call them hearings, I think I would prefer that they are more an informal discussion over a problem that Governor Hammond has identified to be major concern to all of Alaska. That is, alcohol and alcohol abuse. It is my intent that these hearings will be conducted in as informal a manner as possibly can be done. At the same time, holding the continuity of good order. McGrath is the first stop of the official hearing tour. And here we will visit the surrounding village areas. And rather than ask you for your suggestions and advice on legislation that has been proposed, I think

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it suffices to say that the Governor's package of legislation relating to the most important problems ~~can~~^{has} receive statewide attention and with that I think that he would be desirous the same as we are in a solution, or at least substantial curtailment in this project. With that in mind, the method in which we wish to conduct these hearings, you may refer to that package specifically. The committee as such will not. What we seek from you is your suggestions as to how can we address this problem. It is not our intent to suggest because we are in McGrath that McGrath is the community being singled out by having an excessive amount of the problem. We don't know. We do know one thing and feel very, very optimistic that our there with those many minds, some workable and constructive solutions can be legislated into being a benefit to us all. I wish now to allow Senator Hackney to make a few comments and Senator I will give you the floor. I would like to suggest one other thing; each of you received a card and hopefully have pencils or pens. During the course of these hearings should you think of something, would you please write it down, you may sign your name to the suggestion or you may not. But, we really would. Many times we're not afforded the

opportunity at the time that the thought passes through our minds so maybe if we jot it down and then we'll go through them at the conclusion of the hearings and hopefully, if you sign your name we'll know who to thank if not, we'll just have to be satisfied that one of your suggestions was what was implemented. Senator Hackney. . . .

SENATOR HACKNEY:

I can't do anything except second what pretty much what Mike said here. I hope these will be very informal hearings and I think that there are those who don't want to say anything during the hearing that would want to come up to a committee member afterwards, please feel free to do it. We're not here to - - as outsiders, necessarily, we've lived here a long, long time. I would like to comment on what Mike said that a problem that applies specifically to McGrath or to this area. It applies to my area, to Fairbanks. We hope to hear what the people in the Fairbanks area have got to say about the problem. But, I wouldn't downplay the size of it because of wherever we go around the land, we hear that alcoholism and the use and abuse is the biggest problem in Alaska. We would like to hear what answers you have for us. The answers that we can use in the legislative process and maybe do some good in solving the problem.

MIKE COLLETTA: I will allow any of those accompanying us also ~~to address~~
~~the group~~ at this time, Commissioner Williamson, Peterson
and Sharrock. Who would like to speak first.
Let me ask that anyone who wishes, give us a nod
so that we can recognize you and give an answer.
Do you agree that Alaska faces an alcoholism problem?

(later in tape)

QUESTION FROM SOMEONE IN THE SCHOOL DISTRICT:

The main thing is that the school kids don't have
proper care and I'm not really very familiar
with the Governor's package (indiscernible). Could
you tell us very briefly what the package is?
What is the Governor's package? That you were
talking about?

MIKE COLETTA: I would refer that question to a gentleman who
had considerable input into that. Commissioner
Williamson would you answer that?

WILLIAMSON: Sure. And perhaps - - I started to make some
comments and thought I would see how the
comments developed here with everyone. I'll preface
it by saying that Governor Hammond's impressions
of the problem in Alaska from his own long number
of years in the bush primarily in the Bristol Bay
area where he personally had many of the same
experiences that all of us have had. My own
experience - I will reflect on this - stems now

from about twenty-two years of experience in Alaska and it's an interesting thing for me to return to some of these communities such as McGrath which I personally did twenty-two years ago where drinking really wasn't a problem. One of the villages that we are going to visit on our trip - Niposkiok - was the first village I worked in and I never saw drinking and I never saw anyone intoxicated. I can say the same thing for Hooper Bay and Chevak and some of the other places I worked. At that time, in the mid fifties, mid to late fifties, the problem was just starting to just emerge in communities like Bethel, where people were coming in from the villages. Well, in any case, Governor Hammond's only comments to me were that he viewed it as a very serious social health problem throughout the Bristol Bay area and suspected that it was a similar elsewhere and his comment was that we would look into it. We did and we did it by implementing a law that hadn't been implemented when the state adopted the Uniform Alcoholism Intoxication Act. The law states that there shall be an inter-departmental committee comprised of, I think it's five

Commissioners of state departments that have direct - - these departments activities are either affected by or have a direct impact on the distribution and use problem of alcohol. We inaugerated this committee, it had never met before, to my knowledge. In the interim we up the Office of Alcoholism which at that time had a staff of three when we started and then we hired a skilled professional, Bob Cole, known to some of you, to come in and get our program going. We started program evaluations throughout the state to try to find out what sort of impact our programs were having. And not too much. Unfortunately. In any case, we brought together a team of people which included the commissioners of eight departments of State government, I think it's finally the way it came down together with them having received word people from Budget and Management, the Criminal Justice Planning Agency and so on and we spent about eight months. Coincident with that, we obtained a fairly large grant from ^{NIAAA} ~~NIPPA~~ which again by law was charged with supplying states with funds to implement the Uniform Act. So we were able to get money to get our own research - - not that there hasn't been a lot of it done elsewhere, but to begin our own research on the problems particularly as it relates to Alaska

and the relationship of the Alaska problem to that in other states. The Governor's package of legislation was the outcome of the deliberations of the inter-departmental coordinating committee and it wasn't completely an in-house group although largely so. We had input at that time from programs throughout the State some from AFN, some from some of the native corporations, and quite a bit from regional health corporations, regional records within light of those working with various other things. It wasn't a target of the committee that we come up with specific legislative proposals, per se, although ultimately those deliberations resulted in a number of bills and that were introduced this last session, that were our best guess as to some of the things that might function to curb alcoholism and the use of alcohol throughout the state. The package, per se, includes a number of measures, I don't know if I need to go into detail about all of them. Four of them relate to taxes. One of the findings of the committee - and, incidentally I have just one copy with me of that inter-departmental coordinating committee report which is easy reading and can be read in just an hour or two in the evening and includes the highlights of all of our findings. I'll add to that that the money we obtain NIAAA resulted in the production

of a much more exhaustive study, some several volumes that you might not want to wade through. But the small inter-departmental committee report is available for anyone who is interested and would like to leave their name and address and I would be certain that you would receive a copy. Then you can go over the whole thing, the findings relative to the problems throughout the State and what the rationale was to the various legislative proposals. In any case, one of the findings was that the problem of alcohol abuse cost the taxpayers in this state a great deal of money from the State's General Fund. Far more than is obtained by present taxing schedules on alcoholic beverages. We also learned that it had been a long period of years, since 1961, since there had been a tax increase an excise tax increase on alcoholic beverages. Such that, since, over that span of time other commodities had increased in the consumer price index by some forty percent. Alcoholic beverages some 3/10ths of one percent. The relevance of this, to the problem, the relative cost of alcoholic beverages is declining, relative to other commodities. The excise tax measure we hoped would, and still do, would help to make up some of the deficit. We get about seven million dollars now that we can use for a lot

of our programs through taxation and the exact amounts of tax increase proposed were related to that amount that the State is expending annually and not being reimbursed by taxes. We also felt that it would shift the burden, or a greater proportion of it to those who actually use the beverages. So spread it around a little bit in that regard. It also was based on the market place and the impact of increasing taxes have even with the commodities such as alcoholic beverages in that they tend to depress sales to one extent or another, probably in this case, not very much. That was one measure and the other was the allocation of at least 1.5 million in addition for prevention education and treatment programs. A third bill links the excise taxes to the consumer's price index. Such that as that changes excise taxes change with it. Another, the fourth tax measure would allow municipalities to tax beverage alcohol at a rate higher than other commodities and hopefully this would encourage local treatment for local governments for alcohol expenses. Those are the four tax measures, three tax measures and one relative to them. Another was to provide local communities with options regarding how they individually wanted to handle the problem. They felt one existed that needed this kind of action. And this would allow for

local optional actions. In which some thirty five percent of the local governing body could establish that there would be an opportunity for voters to choose among several options such as completely restricting sale and that was the option that the bulk of the voters wish to pursue and have some history of this in Alaska whether its failed or whether it hasn't. A second option was to completely restrict sale plus ban shipment by mail or telephone order in the communities, have a limited community liquor license allowing the community to run a store which would only be allowed to sell a limited amount of alcohol ordered two weeks in advance. That option is premised on experience in (Frobisher Bay and Baflan Island) where the local community has a serious problem with binge drinking and found that if they had delayed sales there was a great reduction. I have further information on this if you are interested. Another was a community liquor license which would allow the community to run its own liquor store, limit sales, control sales hours and thereby hopefully minimizing use of binge drinking. The profits from the sales at the store could be used for local treatment due in other alcohol related costs.

That is the consensus of opinion as to what

This is not been out by what we heard at the meetings - Ft Yukon is getting \$40,000 a month from the local store but still cannot get \$6,000 for their community center.

should be done. To further bring to bear on such option sanctions, it was felt that communities voting themselves dry would lose revenue. And, this has been important various other places, that there could be a revenue sharing measure from the State which would reimburse communities for revenues lost, the dry community group. Also that there would be possession limits in communities that voted themselves dry. Roughly a case of fifths, distilled spirits or 4.5 gallons of wine. Illegal sale penalties are also proposed that are considering a sale in violation of local options, bootlegging, treating this as a felony and with a maximum sentence of six years and fines up to \$30,000 or from up from one year and \$5,000. The committee felt that the present penalties for illegal sales are an acceptable cost when people can make without a great deal of effort \$100,000 or more per year . The confiscation of vehicle or other conveyance of used in bootlegging activities on conviction the conveyance could be sold to the local community. Public notice for licenses, ban on advertising that promotes sale, this proved to be during later parts of the legislative session a controversial part of a package as is the excise tax measure and any thoughts we can glean about these things

*wasn't this in committee
~~sub~~
amendment?*

would be useful certainly to all of us. But the courts have never held that advertising which is contrary to the best interests of health and welfare people is necessarily correct. And there are many states that ban this kind of advertising. That is, two for the price of one, kind of advertising that is to promote more drinking, drink more and more often. There was a bill for appropriations for alcohol treatment (plane going over) some other measure included in sort of a cleaning of the legislation, the major siake - Title IV on alcohol combining our drug abuse and alcohol offices experienced in the comments I heard tonight a rationale for behavioral health model which is something that I estowed that drinking is really things and that its good to approach it that way. We talked a good deal in Anchorage today about involuntary commitments to treatment facilities which is a part of this legislation. That's pretty essentially the package, its primarily a tax issue and you feel an increase in taxes to help pay the bills is appropriate also moderates consumption. I might mention in that regard that most of the efforts made deal with this problem have been ~~ence~~^{one} to limit the availability of the beverages through one mechanism or another, they haven't

been measures designed to reduce the amount of beverage being drunk and turning it around that way would be a landmark effort in this state or anywhere else. The tax measures, the local optional elections, the type of licenses in the community, maybe you don't think any of these things would work. Increased expenditures for treatment programs and for education programs, involuntary commitment or the business of the people out of their own minds certainly a hazard to themselves and perhaps a hazard to others. The Uniform Act passed by the Federal Government in 1972 considers intoxication, public intoxication not a crime so the police can tell you about what kind of a problem this poses for and it is very real. That's pretty essentially the package and if you have questions about it I'll try to answer those. I certainly agree of course with both Mike and Glenn that I'm tired of listening to myself and I'm tired of listening to other committee members and I'm tired of listening to all the folks in Juneau and I personally want to hear from people in rural areas, particularly the smaller ones. Communities such as Bethel, Kotzebue, Nome and so on where I have made more visits certainly than I have been able to make to smaller communities. They are very opinionated about all these things

and they have been very helpful and that isn't necessarily a barometer of what I consider truly rural Alaska.

QUESTION:

Superintendent of the Iditarod School District and there are about 11 different people in this group who work with the school district and in different types of jobs and perhaps if some of them could comment I think it would help to get across the concern of education as a profession in the area, some of the problems that come up because of problems stemming from alcohol or alcoholism related issues. Also there are, I believe, if you met me before, there's been a lot of work that's been done locally. I'm not sure of your background in what you know about what's been done locally and we don't know what the Governor's plan is as far as it relates to education, and so forth. If you could summarize, maybe what is proposed, our schools is it mainly to be community based or.

WILLIAMSON:

What we hear around the State from teachers and I have heard from those in this area, is that there is not in existence, for Alaska, a curriculum package that really meets the needs of all Alaska's communities. Nor has there been ample opportunity if one were available to assist teachers in its use. If that's the route we want to go. There is a lot of controversy nationally and with all

the other educators I've talked to, about what sorts of things should be in the package. We talked about the substance, we talked about other sorts of things combined with what is the best strategy. We had Department of Education input into the task force, of course, I have some more of their specific ideas here if you - - but I don't know the thinking out here and what your experience has been.

QUESTION:

That's why I think some of the people may comment on this. It does involve public safety. I think

Rich from Holy Cross just happened to be here on other business and could comment on like - two attempted rapes