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ALCOHOL PROBLEM IN THE N.W.T. TO BE PRESENTED BY COUNCILLOR
PAUL KAESER IN HIS ADDRESS TO THE N.W.T. COUNCIL JANUARY 1973

It has been a particular concern to me that one of the major social problems in the n.w.t. remains that of Alcoholism, and not more than two or three days go by in each week but what we are reminded again and again that this terrible problem is striking down men, women and children in the City, towns, villages, hamlets from the Yukon to Baffin Island.

The alcohol problem is breaking up families, eroding the employment field, blinding, maiming, killing and rupturing every aspect of society, and we are so used to it and so familiar with its deadly work that we shrug our shoulders and hope that the next victim will not be a close relative or a friend.

The question which burns in my mind ^{and} ~~is~~ ^{is} ~~addressed~~ ^{addressed} ~~to~~ ^{to} ~~you~~ ^{you} ~~today~~ ^{today} and the question which I hope will unscotch the consciences of each Member of Council present, is WHAT IS THE COUNCIL AND WHAT IS THE GOVERNMENT OF THE N.W.T., going to do about it ???

The Government of the N.W.T. has given ample proof for many years that it is quite capable of addressing itself to many deep and disturbing problems with massive attention. When the crucial matters of Education, social assistance, to mention only two, are concerned there seems no end to the personnel and funding released to meet the immediate and long term needs.

But in the field of Alcohol Education the efforts made by the Government in the employment of personnel and the budgeting for resources material is that minimal that most people must consider it an abject token of studied neglect. To look at what the Government have done in this field, the scarcity of personnel, the limiting of funding, is to make sheer hypocrisy of any statements we may make which suggest deep concern, for instance, does the Government of the N.W.T., have a program whereby a valued employee with an alcoholic problem could receive treatment of the disease, instead of being fired. Mr. Commissioner we are not concerned, you are not concerned and we show our abject lack of concern by the miserable programme we pretend is doing some sort of job.

Well, unless this Council do something or bring about some form of action, our happiness will continue and we shall be adding more and more dreadful statistics of death and destruction. I hope that you will agree with me Mr. Commissioner, that action is called for and there must be no more delay.

The time has come when we look at this problem with all the acuity we can bear upon it. The time has come when we must harness all the resources we have in the N.W.T., to attack the present alcohol problem, and that we do it with the funding necessary to make tangible progress. And ^{we} believe, none of this can be done unless we start off with a Commission of Private individuals appointed by the Territorial Council, funded by the Territorial Council and responsible to the Territorial Council. This Commission will be responsible to staff, develop and implement a programme for effective management and control of alcohol and drug abuse. This should include the necessary resources for research, education and treatment.

Reference to final paragraph: Re Commission

The Commission would be similar to the programs now active in the Provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan or most of the other Provinces in Canada. The Commission would consist of private citizens who are concerned enough to take an active interest in the problem of ALCOHOL and/or DRUG ABUSE. This group would be a policy setting group who could with the necessary funding employ the staff to do the job of management and control of alcohol and drug abuse.

This would of necessity be a long term project and would require at least a year of research to determine needs for facilities as well as to establish budgets and other requirements.

The reason for the recommendation of a Commission rather than for the Government to establish an agency is that unless the community is involved and concerned in the planning and implementation nothing will be done. This has been amply demonstrated in the rest of Canada, the Central States and Europe. For example most of the Alcoholism programmes are private organizations, funded by the Government, and therefore responsible to the Government for this program, but NOT a part of Government, so they can be flexible and meet the need as and where it exists.

Two chairs in alcoholism for Alberta universities

Two university chairs in alcoholism will start as soon as enough money is raised to support them, says a prominent alcoholism researcher.

Dr. J.A.L. Gilbert, professor of medicine at the Royal Alexandra Hospital and a prime supporter of the chairs, said about \$750,000 has to be raised for a foundation which will fund the chairs.

The chairs will likely be located at the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary.

The men who fill them will teach on alcoholism to all relevant faculties of the universities, including education, as well as doing research in the field and publicizing the results.

A bill to set up the foundation was passed at the fall sitting of the legislature, and foundation members are to be appointed by the cabinet.

Soon after that, the group will begin looking for donations.

Groups involved in moves which resulted in the bill setting up the foundation include the Alberta Medical Association, the Alberta Pharmaceutical Association, the Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Commission, the Universities of Alberta and Calgary, the Progress and Klaxmen Clubs in Edmonton, and several individuals.

Dr. Gilbert said Thursday the chairs will fill a vacuum in Alberta's universities, and provide a point from which people can be educated about alcoholism. North America's third most frequent killer after heart disease and cancer.

Dr. Gilbert said alcoholism is increasing at a fantastic rate, in the last 15 years more than double the rate of population increase.

He says Alberta has about 30,000 alcoholics, and that each one affects the lives of four to five non-alcoholics, for a grand total of 150,000 to 150,000 people, or about 10 per cent of the province's population.

Thirty per cent of all emergency cases the Royal Alex sees have been drinking, and the average blood alcohol level is .16 per cent, double the legal intoxication level.

He notes that there has been a large increase in impaired driving charges against young people since the legal age for liquor drinking was dropped to 18, the average age of those arrested for the offence dropping from 32 to the mid-20s.

And Dr. Gilbert says that for every drunk the hospital sees, there are 10 more who can afford a home to stay in.

He calls the problem "pandemic," transcending both social and national boundaries.

Society, he says, now accepts drinking as one of its mores, as large numbers of people are able to drink without affecting their supply of life's basic necessities.

"Just look at liquor ads in status magazines. There are scores of them — a man is with a boat, a girl or a flashy car, he's always well dressed, standing there with a silly grin on his face — this is the image of 'the good life'."

One of the reasons for the high rate of increase in alcoholism, he says, is sheer boredom — the advent of passive involvement such as watching television, combined with more leisure time as the work week steadily shrinks.

Alcoholism, says Dr. Gilbert, has a recovery rate of 50 per cent, a rate he believes justifies more work being done on the problem.

By contrast, he noted, there is only a five per cent chance that a person treated for obesity will still weigh less in two years.

Manitoba urges alcohol program

Manitoba Attorney-General A. H. Mackling yesterday urged the federal Government to convene a federal-provincial conference to develop a co-ordinated program to combat alcohol abuse, which he termed Canada's "No. 1 social problem." Mr. Mackling also suggested that a national research program on the causes, effects and incidence of alcohol abuse and resulting problems be implemented by the Department of National Health and Welfare. As the minister responsible for the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission, Mr. Mackling submitted his proposals in a letter to National Health Minister Marc Lalonde. He offered Winnipeg as the conference site, and suggested Manitoba would be an appropriate site for a national research clinic dealing with alcohol and drug addiction.