

MPP has the answer, Mr. Miller

Raise drinking age — save millions

Raising the legal drinking age in Ontario to 21 from 18 could save the provincial government much, if not all, of the \$50 million which Health Minister Frank Miller is attempting to pare from the budget this year.

Mr. Miller has ordered the closing of 10 hospitals in Ontario, and the removal of beds and some services from others in an effort to save money. According to figures from the Addiction Research Foundation, the government spends in excess of \$200 million annually on treatment of alcohol-abuse-related illness and injury.

These figures were raised during a seminar on the problems of youth drinking held at Sheridan College last week, as part of a province-wide study by an interministerial panel headed by Mississauga North MPP Terry Jones. Mr. Jones responded to a question from the audience concerning loss of revenue from alcohol taxes if the drinking age was raised, by saying the province would save a great deal more money than it would lose if the age is raised.

Mr. Jones produced statistics showing that a full 50 per cent of all traffic accidents are alcohol-related, while ARF counsellor Peter Marks had even more conclusive proof.

While costs for alcohol-related treatment have not been broken down into age

groups, ARF studies in London show that the accident rate for 18-year-olds in the year which followed the lowering of the drinking age from 21 to 18 in 1971 had risen 300 per cent, while the number of accidents for 19-year-olds in the area had risen 348 per cent.

"We are faced with some statistics that are compelling and startling," the MPP told the audience of about 150. "We are finding an increasing number of younger and younger ages are drinking or experimenting with alcohol — and this is shocking."

He cited ARF statistics which showed that 92.5 per cent of all grade 13 students are involved with alcohol, while 51.5 per cent of grade seven students have experimented with the drug. There was a 160 per cent increase in use by people aged 16 and 17 in the first year after the legal age was changed.

Drinkers at an early age have greater chance of suffering permanent brain damage than do older people, said Mr. Jones. This causes a rippling effect which creates more medical costs when the drinker is older.

"There is medical proof that while it takes an average individual 15 years to become an alcoholic, young people can take only 15 months before they suffer irreparable brain damage," he said.

Mr. Marks said the figure \$200 million was "extremely conservative" and the real figure was much higher.

"It's only been in recent years that a few doctors, not the majority but a few have started coming to terms with pointing out alcoholism in families," he said.

He blamed close ties between doctors and patients

and the fear of losing clients, for the doctors' reticence in naming alcohol as the cause of an illness.

"Six per cent of all age groups over 18 are chronic alcoholics," said Mr. Marks. "There's no doubt that alcohol is the number one killer in the world."

Mr. Marks also pointed out that each alcoholic usually has a negative affect on the lives of three other people, whether they be at work or in their family. Using the six per cent figure, he explained that this meant a full 25 per cent of the population are adversely affected by alcoholism in their lives.

Mr. Miller has not issued a public policy statement concerning the drinking age issue, but a spokesman for his ministry said "alcohol and drug abuse is the most difficult and frustrating problem he has to face in his duties. He will make his views known when it comes in front of the Cabinet."

"Your own control" — The spokesman said the Ministry of Health's alcohol rehabilitation efforts have focused on education programs aimed at the social drinker, not the hard core alcoholic. The program includes such things as "detoxification centres" staffed by former alcoholics instead of police drunk tanks, and the "you are your own liquor control board" publicity campaigns.

Mr. Jones will present his findings, along with his recommendations for solving the drinking problem to Premier William Davis and the full Cabinet April 1. Despite the possible savings, he said money has not become an issue in his study.

Mr. Jones has the option of recommending the age be changed to 19, 20 or 21, but he said there were legal matters related to the age of majority, of which drinking is a part, which have to be considered.



MISSISSAUGA MPP TERRY JONES (with mike) answers a question from the audience. With him on the panel at Sheridan are, from the left: Jim Fuller, Halton Family Court Judge; Chief Ken Skerrett, Halton Regional Police; Peter Marks, Addiction Research Foundation; Peter Heimler, Deputy Prime Minister at Oakville Trafalgar High School; Peter Young, Youth Services Chief, Oakville.

Reed investigating self-serve stations

Halton Hills councillors aren't the only politicians concerned about the mushrooming number of self-serve gas outlets.

Ontario Liberal Consumer and Commercial relations critic, and Halton-Burlington MPP, Julian Reed, said in an interview this week he has been investigating the self-serve situation for over three months now.

"It is becoming a real problem with self-serve stations putting independent gas retailers out of business," Reed declared.

Reed claims petroleum firms say they don't want to see the independent retailer run out of business but then they turn around and sell gas cheaper to the self-serve stations.

"Anytime you see gas cheaper than three cents below the price at manned pumps you know the station is getting its gas cheaper," Reed explained.

He is concerned about self-serve stations putting independent retailers out of business and wonders how much cheaper self-serve gas will be if the day ever arrives when the self-serve stations don't have any competition.

Reed is also worried about the effects of the mushrooming number of self-serve stations on the mechanical end of the gas station business.

While he doesn't think there will be a shortage of places

where motorists can get their cars repaired he does think self-serve stations will force labor costs up.

"If the gas station owner has to make all his money servicing cars it will make repairs more expensive for the consumer," he explained.

Reed predicted in many cases the oil companies will run the self-serve pumps and the mechanic will rent the service bays.

"Say a person goes in for an oil change and a lube job. He doesn't control the petroleum end of things so he doesn't make any money on the oil or grease so to regain profit labor costs have to go up. Self-serve stations are a great concern of mine because they are destroying the livelihood of the independent retailer."

Keith Leslie weed inspector?

Keith Leslie will be invited to attend a Halton Hills works committee meeting to see if he is interested in serving as the town's weed inspector again this year.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Food has advised the town it must appoint an inspector by the end of the month.

Engineer Robert Austin said he didn't think Mr. Leslie will accept the position unless he gets a raise this year. He also warned if the town has to go out and find a new inspector the Queen's Park deadline won't be met.

Works committee also decided Monday it must sit down soon and come up with a new weed inspection policy complete with new regulations and ways of enforcement.

Legion

A membership campaign is underway at the Legion. Total membership last year was 477, and executive members expect it will increase to 525 by the end of this month.

Award

Nominations for the Charles Thompson award will be discussed at the next meeting of the recreation advisory committee Tuesday, March 16.

Five charges in disturbance

As a result of a disturbance at the Station Hotel Saturday night, one Acton man and four Toronto men were charged with causing a disturbance.

—Students are looking forward to their winter holiday break, which starts March 20 and runs to March 28.

Alcohol number one killer worse than marijuana — panel

"There is no doubt that alcohol is the number one killer in the world," according to Addiction Research Foundation representative Peter Marks.

Mr. Marks chaired a seminar on youth and alcohol abuse at Sheridan College in Oakville last week, part of a province-wide study by the Ontario Government to determine the amount of alcohol abuse in Ontario since the legal drinking age was lowered to 18 from 21 in 1971.

The interministerial study, headed by Mississauga North MPP Terry Jones has been criss-crossing the province talking to school groups, police chiefs, politicians and other interested parties to find a way to cut down on the incidence of alcoholism and alcohol abuse by young people.

May change — The committee will go before Premier William Davis and the full Cabinet April 1 with its recommendations. The number one issue is whether to change the drinking age back to 21.

Mr. Jones has been told by Halton youths that there is no bar in Halton County which underage people cannot get into. He said drinking among people aged 16 and 17 rose 160 per cent in the first year after the law was changed.

The other major issue, and perhaps an even more controversial one, is the relationship between drugs and alcohol.

Mr. Jones said many people have told him, during his study, that they have noticed a pronounced decrease in the illegal use of drugs by teenagers since they have started drinking.

When the law was changed, and the trend away from drugs began, many groups looked upon the switch as a good step, in the belief, founded on thousands of years of drinking in our society, that drugs were much more dangerous than drink.

Mr. Marks said this wrong attitude is perhaps the biggest problem which faces the committee. Although Mr. Jones expressed his confidence in today's teenagers, saying they were better educated in regard to drugs, and that he doubted there would be a resurgence in drug use if the drinking age was raised, the problem still remained. If the drinking age is raised, it is almost definite that there will be an increase in the use of drugs, he felt.

In this case, it is the adults who need to be educated, said Mr. Marks.

"I've seen many kids and adults go through a heavy (drug) using habit for two or three years, who go on to very productive lives," Marks told

the audience of 150. "The long-term effects of alcohol are far worse. I'm not advocating the legalizing of marijuana, or loosening the laws, but studies have not shown any long-term physical damage or brain damage from the use of marijuana."

"My point," he told this newspaper later, "is that we can't just say 'drugs are drugs' and lump them together. Grass is less physically addictive than alcohol, although it does have its problems."

The Addiction Research Foundation has recommended the drinking age be returned to 21. Marks said he believes Mr. Jones realizes that alcohol is worse than grass.

"I think Jones has realized this because of the number of case studies he has seen over the past few months, but I think there are many politicians who haven't had the time or experiences to realize it."

Peter Heimler, deputy prime minister of the student council at Oakville Trafalgar High School, told the panel "young people are a lot more educated about drugs and its effects. Five years ago," he

said, "people were still in a cloud about it."

Heimler also described drinking experiences he had witnessed among his peers, saying "drinking is the number one sport in high schools on the weekends." He said vomiting could become something to brag about on Monday morning at school and that in some peer groups this was looked upon as desirable.

Other members of the audience suggested that peer pressures and the pressures in society today were to be blamed for the increase in drinking.

"How do you expect 16-year-olds to handle the pressure when there are so many adults that can't?" one student asked.

Mr. Jones is expected to suggest a vastly improved educational system be set up, with more emphasis on the bad effects of drinking.

This is a part of the problem which particularly irks Mr. Marks, who blamed the lack of interest from schools for much of the problem.

"Every high school principal in the area was contacted, and every school board trustee was contacted. Where

were they at the meeting?" he asked.

Mr. Marks said most kids, if they choose the right options in school, only receive about 20 hours a year of instruction dealing with alcohol abuse. If they choose other options, he said, they might receive none at all. He termed this "incredible" in view of the proportions of the problem in this province.

Should Mr. Jones recommend raising the drinking age, the provincial government will be faced with the legal problems which tie drinking with the age of majority. The right to drink was included with voting rights, marriage, land-owning and other freedoms when the laws were changed.

Mr. Jones said he was "worried about creating disregard for the law, by taking away a right that has been given to someone." He said the legal aspect was one of the reasons the drinking age was changed in 1971, to grant full adult status to people 18 and over.

By April 1, Mr. Jones will have to tell the government whether that was a mistake or not.

What you don't know about your water heater may shock you.



A blast of cold water may wake you up to it. The fact is, it may be time to replace your present gas water heater with a new Gulfstream. But chances are, you'll wait until your present one develops a leak, and then do something about it.

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What we're saying is simple. When it comes to replacing your present system, remember Gulfstream. You can lease one, or buy one, depending on your choice.

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Speaker at Y program

John McDonald, who writes the popular historical series in The Free Press, is guest speaker at the Ladies' Y Take-a-Break at the Y this morning (Wednesday).