

Alaska State Legislature

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



Official Business

State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801-1181

Representative Norman Rokeberg
Room 24, State Capitol Building, Juneau, AK 99801-1182
Telephone: (907) 465-4968
Fax: (907) 465-2040

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 4, 2001

CONTACT: Rep. Norman Rokeberg, (907) 465-4968

Drunk Driving Bill Progressing through House **Rokeberg's HB 4 Would Make Alaska Laws Toughest in Nation**

(JUNEAU) – Alaskans would enjoy the protection of the toughest anti-drunk driving laws in the nation under House Bill 4, a wide-ranging bill sponsored by Rep. Norman Rokeberg (R-Anchorage) that passed his House Judiciary Committee on Tuesday.

“This is a major bill that would give Alaska the toughest drunk driving laws in the United States,” said Rokeberg. “It sends a very clear message to people who abuse alcohol: We don’t want drinking and driving to continue in the state of Alaska. We’re going to make people wake up and realize they are responsible for their actions.”

Rokeberg said he drafted House Bill 4 in response to last year’s tragic wave of drunk driving accidents around the state, and in response to the recommendations of a mayor’s DUI task force in Anchorage. It includes a broad array of legal action to increase the penalties for drunken driving, including:

- Lowering drivers’ allowable blood alcohol content to 0.8 percent
- Substantially increasing fines and/or jail terms for drunken driving convictions, including raising the existing \$250 fine for first-time offenses to \$1,500
- Allowing police to immobilize or confiscate an offender’s car for a second DUI offense, and mandating forfeiture for a third offense
- Confiscating the license plates of vehicles used in drunken driving offenses
- Mandating alcoholism treatment for offenders imprisoned long-term
- Increasing the presumptive sentence for vehicular manslaughter
- Changing state law to bar driving while impaired, and including inhalants or other substances that may impair drivers’ abilities
- Extending the five-year “look-back” term for drunk driving to 10 years, so that a driver’s fourth DUI within 10 years will automatically be a felony

The bill also has a treatment component, requiring those imprisoned for drunk driving convictions to undergo mandatory alcoholism treatment, and to reimburse the state for up to \$10,000 in treatment costs.

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“We’re cognizant of the fact that one way to get habitual drunk drivers off the streets is to make sure they get screened and evaluated and get the proper treatment that can help them get over this disease or problem,” Rokeberg said.

Rokeberg called the bill a centerpiece of the Republican Majority’s efforts to address problems with alcohol abuse in Alaska. Other elements include innovative therapeutic courts for substance abuse offenders, recriminalization of juvenile possession or consumption of alcohol, liability protections for cab drivers conveying intoxicated drivers or their cars home, and strengthened anti-bootlegging legislation.

“Our goal with HB 4 is to lower the number of accidents, injuries and deaths that can be attributed to the use of alcohol in this state,” Rokeberg said. “We are trying to discourage irresponsible behavior. Alcohol abuse causes a number of problems in this state, from domestic violence to traffic fatalities, and I think that by focusing on drunk driving we can remove as many impaired drivers from the road as possible and hopefully have a positive effect on other behaviors as well.”

HB 4 moves next to the House Finance Committee.

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Broadcasters note: Comments are available on the Majority Actuality Line 1 (800) 478-6540