

Alberta Throne Speech includes tobacco reduction • Senate hearings to be held on youth tobacco bill • Edmonton City Councillors backtrack on bylaw • Calgary bylaw still smouldering • British Columbia restores public smoking ban • Saskatchewan legislative committee calls for action • Smoke-free homes on the rise in Alberta • Paul Martin ponders tobacco tax increase • Cigarette consumption higher in low tax provinces • Support builds for ATRA resolution

➤ Alberta Throne Speech includes tobacco reduction

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For the first time ever, the opening of the 2001 spring legislative session on February 12 was marked with a speech from the throne that included tobacco reduction. The throne speech outlines the government's policy priorities for the upcoming year.

The throne speech, delivered by Lieutenant-Governor Lois Hole, stated "initiatives aimed at reducing the use of tobacco products, especially among children and young adults, will be expanded". No further details were provided but it was implied that the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC) could play a prominent role.

The Legislature was dissolved on the same day with the call of the provincial election.

However the election platform of the Alberta Progressive Conservatives closely mirrored the throne speech and included a plank on tobacco reduction. The PC's health platform stated "To build our health care system together we will...focus on wellness including initiatives aimed at reducing tobacco use".

"We applaud the Alberta government's bold

commitment to reduce tobacco use" said Stan Schumacher, Honorary Patron of ASH and former speaker of the Legislative Assembly. "The throne speech and the election platform have clearly established tobacco reduction as a government priority. As the result of the election, the Klein government now has a huge mandate to deliver its promise to reduce tobacco use in Alberta".

The next four-year term of the Legislative Assembly will officially commence on April 9 with another speech from the throne. It is anticipated that the government will restate its priorities during the reopening of the spring session.

The Honourable Gary Mar, a driving force behind the government's commitment to tobacco reduction, was recently reappointed as the Minister of Health and Wellness.

An intergovernmental committee chaired by AADAC's Chief Executive Officer, Paddy Meade, is presently formulating recommendations for a provincial tobacco strategy. The recommendations are expected to be announced by June.

➤ Senate hearings to be held on youth tobacco bill

Senator Colin Kenny has reintroduced a bill in the Upper House that would reduce youth tobacco use through the creation of a \$360 million trust that is funded by Canadian tobacco companies. Bill S-15, the Tobacco Youth Protection Act has now gone through its third incarnation as the result of Senator Kenny's unwavering determination.

A Senate committee will be holding hearings on the bill across Canada in April. Hearings in Calgary and Edmonton are scheduled for April 24 and 25, respectively.

In a recent public appeal, Senator Kenny challenged Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and Health Minister Alan Rock to make the Senator "unimportant" by taking

government action that would achieve the same objectives as Bill S-15. The federal government is rumoured to be considering measures that could take the place of Kenny's bill.

➤ Edmonton City Councillors backtrack on bylaw

Despite protests from health groups, restaurants, and local newspapers, Edmonton City Council has decided to allow restaurants to become adult-only facilities where smoking is permitted. The 6-5 decision to amend the bylaw followed Council's 6-5 decision in December to prohibit smoking in all Edmonton restaurants.

The amendment was intended to appease the concerns of local businesses that cater to smokers and fear subsequent business losses. However even the Alberta Restaurant and Food Association opposed the "Mickey Mouse amendment" that will force restaurants to make the difficult choice

between children and smokers. The amendment will create an uneven playing field among restaurants by providing an escape clause for restaurants that cater to adults.

All three major Edmonton newspapers wrote editorials denouncing the amendment. Unfortunately their arguments fell on deaf ears among a majority of Council members.

The sponsor of the amendment, Councillor Bryan Anderson, has predicted that less than five percent of restaurants will choose the option of catering to adults only. It remains to be seen if this prediction will come true when the bylaw takes effect on May 2.

➤ Calgary bylaw still smouldering

Calgary City Council may soon be determining the fate of a proposed smoking ban in restaurants following a public consultation process that will be completed in May. The city's bylaw department has been instructed to conduct focus groups and a public opinion poll to determine residents' views on the proposal.

However the Calgary Tobacco Reduction Action Coalition (CTRAC) feels that the consultations may be a waste of time and a simple stalling tactic. Several public opinion polls and focus groups have already been conducted showing strong support for smoking bans in establishments where children are allowed.

In January, CTRAC launched an advertising campaign and website encouraging Calgarians to express their opinion on the bylaw. Prominent advertisements focusing on children's exposure to secondhand smoke are appearing on billboards, city buses and trains, and in local newspapers. To date, over 3,000 people have visited the website with 88% supporting a smoking ban in restaurants.

To register your views on the proposed bylaw, visit CTRAC's bylaw campaign website at www.smokefreecalgary.com

➤ Paul Martin ponders tobacco tax increase

Federal Finance Minister Paul Martin is reported to be considering a tobacco tax increase in conjunction with tax increases in Ontario, Quebec and the Maritime provinces.

These provinces lowered tobacco taxes in concert with the federal government in 1994.

The rumoured increase ranges from \$3 to \$6 per carton in central and eastern Canada.

Tobacco prices in Ontario and Quebec are presently the lowest in North America.

Tobacco taxes are one of the most effective measures to reduce tobacco use, particularly among young people.

➤ British Columbia restores public smoking ban

After a year-long review process, the Workers Compensation Board of British Columbia is restoring a province-wide smoking ban in restaurants, bars, and residential facilities.

The ban is scheduled to take effect on September 10, 2001.

The B.C. Supreme Court struck down the original ban in March 2000 on a process technicality. The Court ruled that the Workers Compensation Board did not conduct a proper consultation with the

hospitality industry prior banning smoking in restaurants and bars. However the merits of the smoking ban were unchallenged.

This time around, the WCB conducted a very thorough consultation that involved a new round of public hearings and over 500 oral and written submissions. The WCB also conducted a thorough review of available scientific evidence as well as an economic impact analysis.

➤ Saskatchewan legislative committee calls for action

An all-party legislative committee recently completed a report calling for comprehensive legislation and strategies to reduce tobacco use in Saskatchewan.

The report calls for tobacco tax increases, a phased-in smoking ban in public areas and workplaces, wide-ranging tobacco control legislation, and a funding commitment of at least \$5/capita for a sophisticated, evidence-based provincial tobacco strategy.

Health groups mostly praised the report but cited several shortcomings such as a proposal to prohibit tobacco possession among minors that is believed to be unenforceable.

To date, there has been no formal government response to the recommendations.

➤ Smoke-free homes on the rise in Alberta

A recent survey commissioned by the Alberta Tobacco Reduction Alliance found that smoking in Alberta households has dropped dramatically since 1998. The survey revealed that 62% of Albertans completely banned smoking in their homes in 2000 compared to just 44% in 1998.

From 1997 to 1999, ASH coordinated the Clear the Air Campaign, a project promoting smoke-free homes in Alberta. The campaign was the largest project of its kind in Canada with over 45,000 households taking part. Health Canada, Alberta Health and ATRA provided funding for the project.

"We are delighted with the dramatic decline in smoking in Alberta households" said Les Hagen, executive director of ASH. "The Clear the Air Campaign was a very worthwhile initiative that helped to promote the trend toward more smoke-free homes".

The telephone survey of 2,523 respondents was conducted by Banister Research & Consulting between May and June 2000. The survey results are accurate to within two percentage points 19 times out of 20.

➤ **Cigarette consumption higher in low tax provinces**

Per capita cigarette consumption is significantly higher in provinces with low taxes, according to new data released by Health Canada. Smokers consumed an average of between 14.0 and 15.5 cigarettes daily in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Newfoundland. Taken together, these provinces have the highest tobacco taxes in Canada. In the remaining provinces, consumption varied between 17.5 and 18.0 cigarettes a day.

This data was collected by Health Canada’s Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey-an ongoing randomized survey of the smoking behaviour of 10,500 Canadians. The data represented smoking patterns across Canada in 1999.

Alberta has the lowest tobacco taxes and the highest smoking prevalence among the four western provinces. Conversely, British Columbia has the highest tobacco taxes and the lowest smoking prevalence among western provinces.

➤ **Support builds for ATRA resolution**

Provincial support continues to build for a public policy resolution championed by the Alberta Tobacco Reduction Alliance (ATRA). Over 730 organizations have endorsed the resolution that calls for smoking bans in public areas and workplaces, tobacco tax increases, dedicated

funding for tobacco reduction programs, and assistance for smokers who want to quit.

“We are delighted with the response from a wide range of organizations across Alberta” said Alan Shaw, ATRA communications director. “We are keeping

the government apprised of the tremendous support for our policy proposals and we are confident of our ultimate success”.

ATRA is a provincial alliance of over 90 organizations that support tobacco reduction.

➤ **Help ASH build a smoke-free future.** Your contribution is welcome.

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Memberships:	<input type="checkbox"/> \$25 Annual	<input type="checkbox"/> \$60/3 years	<input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Corporate	
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