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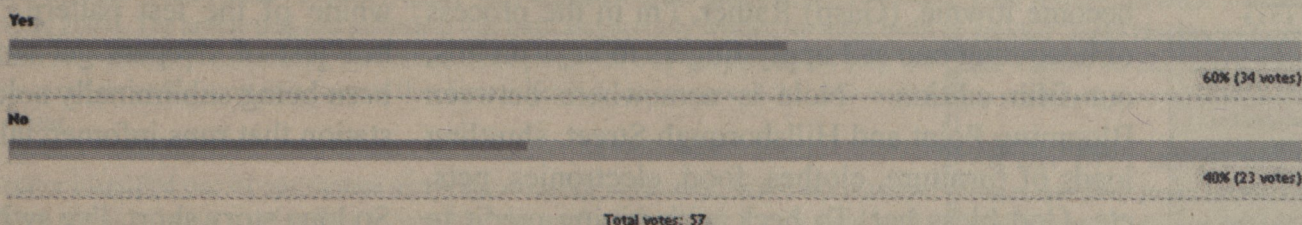
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Posted by The Cadre Staff on Wed, 10/20/2004 - 22:12



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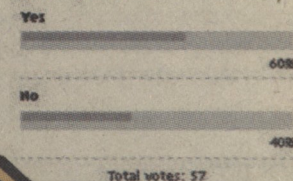
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POLL

Would you like to see liquor sold at convenience and grocery stores?



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Issue #5



City Councillor Pushes for Liquor Sales in Convenience Stores

By Nick Stewart
News Editor

Charlottetown City councillor Bruce Garrity is on a mission to allow private liquor sales in convenience stores on PEI.

"I'm asking the province to review its liquor legislation and open up liquor sales to corner stores," Garrity said. Some Canadian provinces, Newfoundland and Quebec, already allow the practice. "There," he adds, "you can go to your gas station and pick up a 6-pack. We should be able to do this here."

He says many people don't plan ahead of time to have a few beer, and after 10 pm all the liquor stores are closed. He thinks the sale of alcohol should be more convenient. "We're all adults here and we should be treated like adults. I mean, we only got cold beer in the liquor stores just a few years ago and we think it's wonderful - this is ridiculous. Liquor sales can be much more convenient. We are a free, independent society and we should have more choice."

Instead of having a choice to buy liquor at convenience store, the only option after hours is to buy from a bootlegger, Garrity explains. Garrity argues more has to be done to curtail bootlegging because they are illegal and very unsafe. He doesn't claim this will eliminate bootlegging by any means, but points out it is a step in the right direction. A problem Garrity faces is that city council cannot change the liquor laws. Instead he must lobby the provincial government, as it is responsible for liquor legislation.

Two weeks ago, Development Minister Mike Currie said he would consider the idea, but just a day later, Premier Pat Binns announced he was opposed to Garrity's proposal. The Premier told The Cadre he supports the current system in place with mainly public liquor sales operated by the PEI Liquor Commission (there is one privately commissioned store located in Morell). He says it generates profit for the government which can be used to support education and health care.

Garrity doesn't accept this position, arguing the province would not lose money as it would retain these profits through commissions at private stores. However, Binns has argued the government has recently made many capital investments in public liquor stores, and it would be hard to justify those investments if liquor sales were now opened up to corner stores. In addition to the Premier, Garrity is also facing opposition from PEI Liberal Leader Robert Ghiz.

"I do not see a need to change the way we sell beer or wine," Ghiz claimed, however, he did say he would revisit the idea if he believed a large number of Islanders favor a change. The current opposition of both party leaders in the provincial legislature means the changes proposed by Garrity have a long road to climb before we see liquor for sale in convenience stores on PEI.