

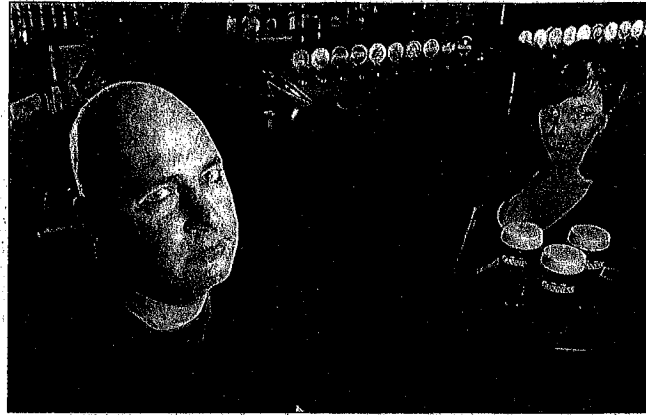
Lower legal limit expected to hurt sales

Eateries worry about impact of legislation

MARIO TONEGUZZI
CALGARY HERALD

Alberta restaurant owners say proposed tougher drinking and driving legislation will take a huge bite out of their business, leading to inevitable job cuts and some establishments closing their doors.

Mike Joseph, president of **Ceili's Irish Pub & Restaurant**, with two locations in Calgary and two in Vancouver, said tougher legislation in British Columbia has been "horrific" for the industry there and will



Leah Hennel, Calgary Herald

Mike Joseph, president of Ceili's Irish Pub and Restaurant in Calgary, opposes the proposed new legislation.

be as well in this province.

"We've seen a 30 per cent decrease in sales" in B.C., said Joseph. "What the legislation does, as it's done in B.C., it's

targeting the social drinker, the guy who wants to go out for a beer after work."

Joseph said his Calgary establishments employ about

250 people. He said if similar legislation goes through in Alberta there could be a decrease of 40 to 50 employees in the Calgary locations.

However, Jonathan Denis, Alberta's solicitor general and minister of public security, said Bill 26 does not have the intent of harming anyone's business but simply to get the "drunks off the road."

"We are not changing the blood alcohol limits. There already is a .05 legislation if you refer to Section 89 of the Traffic Safety Act. . . . We have not modelled our legislation after B.C.'s," he said, adding Alberta's legislation does not involve fines as does its western neighbour's.

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LIQUOR: An effect on hospitality

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"There's not the intention to harm anybody rather just to make our streets safer. . . . We are not after a man or woman who has a cocktail, beer or wine with the meal or after work," Denis said.

For drivers who record a blood-alcohol level between .05 and .08, the province currently allows police to impose a 24-hour licence suspension. The new legislation would increase that to an automatic three-day suspension and a three-day vehicle seizure for a first offence. A seven-day vehicle seizure along with a 15-day suspension or 30-day suspension would be triggered for a second and third offence, respectively.

Drivers who blow over .08 will get a criminal charge and lose their licences until their charges are resolved by the courts. Those convicted will be required to equip their cars with an interlock device that measures a driver's breath for alcohol before starting the ignition.

The bill also targets new drivers, imposing a seven-day seizure and 30-day suspension if they are found with any alcohol in their system.

Brian Lee, vice-president of the Concorde Group with 11 venues in Calgary with about 700 employees, said the proposed legislation will have a "pretty significant negative impact on hospitality in this province similar to what happened in B.C."

"If you lose 25 per cent of your revenue, obviously you have to make business adjustments and the hospitality industry is a labour-intensive industry. We have to staff to match our business levels. And if they dramatically decrease, then we will have to cut back staff."

Lee also said it would put many business in a precarious position with some not being able to survive.

In a letter to Premier Alison Redford, Harris Dvorkin, president and chief operating officer of **Ranchman's Hospitality Group Inc.**, urged her to reconsider all of the ramifications of bringing the B.C. laws to Alberta.

"Please consider the loss of revenues of now struggling small private businesses, loss of employment in the hospitality industry, and that these new laws will not be as effective towards reducing driving fatalities as creating a stricter penalty for those breaking the existing laws of 0.08," he wrote.

The Ranchman's Cookhouse & Dancehall Inc. on Macleod Trail employs 120 people and that balloons to over 500 staff during the Calgary Stampede.

The gross payroll March through October was just under \$1.4 million, he wrote.

"Based on sales percentages, I will have to lower our wage costs by at least \$363,902.00 to survive a projected 26 per cent decrease in sales," he wrote.

weeks notice to 10 full time and 23 part time employees if this law is enacted. The majority of the part time employees are students working their way through college and university — the future of our Province."

In an interview, Dvorkin said this was the "most offensive (Progressive Conservative) move" since Premier Ed Stelmach wanted to change the royalty structure in the energy sector.

"Not thought out and not listening to the industry calamity," said Dvorkin.

The Canadian Restaurant and Food-services Association has received more than 2,000 petitions from Alberta business owners, their employees and customers who are concerned that Bill 26 targets the wrong people. The petitions have also been sent to Redford and Transportation Minister Ray Danyluk.

"CRFA fully supports tougher penalties for drivers with a blood-alcohol content (BAC) above .08, as well as graduated licensing," said Garth Whyte, CRFA's president and chief executive. "What we don't support are the stricter penalties for drivers with a BAC from .05 — .08. This piece of the legislation affects responsible drivers who are not legally impaired, and is unnecessarily confusing and intimidating to ordinary Albertans."