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**Veto Message: Governor Snelling  
1983 (H248)**

**An act to add 7 V.S.A. § 2 (25) relating to the drinking age.**

STATE OF VERMONT  
Executive Department.  
Montpelier, Vt., April 19, 1983

The Speaker placed before the House the following communication from the Governor relative to the veto of House bill, entitled

An act to add 7 V.S.A. § 2 (25) relating to the drinking age:

The Honorable Stephan A. Morse  
Speaker of the House  
Vermont House of Representatives  
State House  
Montpelier, Vermont 05602  
RE: H. 248

Dear Mr. Speaker:

I have received from the House H. 248. This legislation would change the age of majority from 18 to 19 solely for the purposes of the purchase and consumption of alcoholic beverages. Under the power vested in me by Section 11 of Chapter II, of the Vermont Constitution, I am herewith returning H. 248 unsigned.

In my veto message last year regarding a similar bill, I said, 'I cannot in good conscience accede to such a double standard of majority or of the rights of citizenship thus inferred.' My conscience has not changed.

I also stated I would pledge myself to continue efforts to find constructive and appropriate ways to deal with the very serious problems of alcohol abuse. Since that time, I have undertaken

several executive actions, and proposed to this Legislature the components of the comprehensive program I believe necessary to address effectively the long-term root causes of alcohol abuse through preventative and educational efforts in the schools, communities and homes.

In January, I issued Executive Order Number 69, establishing a special cabinet task force for the prevention, education and treatment of alcohol abuse. Since that time, the task force, chaired by Human Services Secretary, Dr. Lloyd Novick, has provided a thoughtful interim report with specific recommendations for action. Many of these recommendations are now being implemented, and others have been included in our legislative proposals.

I am heartened that both Houses have passed H.453, the most important and far-reaching of the legislative proposals, a comprehensive alcohol education program, which I recommended in both my Inaugural and Budget messages.

H.453 creates the Alcohol and Drug Council, which will replace the special cabinet task force. The Council, in conjunction with the Education Department, will continue development of the comprehensive alcohol education curriculum, and assure that it will be integrated in the public education program in grades one through twelve. H.453 also requires that all driver education classes include a specific program on the effects of alcohol and drugs on driving.

My budget recommendations included an additional \$400,000.00 to the Agency of Human Services to fund the concepts of H.453 as well as other innovative prevention, intervention and treatment programs. H.453, when fully implemented, will provide our best opportunity to address the root problems of alcohol abuse.

Other measures that I have proposed to remove drinking drivers from our roads have yet to be adopted by this General Assembly. The addition of 50 state troopers would add significantly not only to the overall law enforcement capacity of our state police, but more specifically, would assure a higher rate of apprehension of

drinking drivers.

This Legislature can be proud that it has made distinct progress toward addressing the very serious concern of all Vermonters for alcohol abuse. I really do not believe the enactment of H.248 would have any appreciable additional positive effect. Moreover, it singles out 18 year olds for selective prohibition, when it is clear the problem affects a much broader age group.

Nothing has occurred since last year that makes it logical to raise the drinking age. In fact, continuing analysis of the results of raising the drinking age in other states makes it clear that such measures have not been effective.

It now also appears very likely that New Hampshire will revise its current 20-year drinking age to 21. Several other states have this year raised ages only recently raised and have stated that they did so because prior increases had proven ineffective. These actions are hardly evidence that Vermont should embark on a similar illogical 'search' for a safe drinking age.

Furthermore, should New Hampshire adopt age 21, Vermont will then be bordered by states with four different drinking ages-18 to the north, 19 to the west, 20 to the south and 21 to the east, making it clear that Vermont cannot logically raise its age for the purpose of establishing compatibility with its neighbors and must, therefore, establish a legal drinking age which is reasonable and fair rather than one which is like that of one of its four neighbors.

Additionally, I believe it is imperative that once apprehended, the drunk driver receives a fair, yet rapid, hearing to assure he is not able to postpone the loss of license through our current legal process. Rapid and sure loss of the right to drive is, perhaps, the strongest deterrent to those who will drink and drive.

Finally, I am pleased to note that after I vetoed H.188 last year, the enhanced penalty provisions for those underage who purchase alcoholic beverages and those who provide them, which were contained in H.188, were adopted in full by the Legislature.

I do know this is a matter on which men and women of good will and good intentions have strongly different feelings. We are each obligated to act in accord with our convictions. Although I cannot approve H.248, I will do all within the power vested in me as Chief Executive Officer of the State to assure that the problems of alcohol abuse continue to receive the highest priority of the Executive Branch.

Sincerely,  
/s/ Richard A. Snelling,  
Governor

### **Governor's Veto Sustained H. 248**

The Governor's veto was sustained in the House:  
**Yeas 89 Nays 55**

Note: The two-thirds majority vote was not attained thus the veto was ruled sustained.

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Sources: *Journal of the House*, April 19, 1983 (pages 547-549, 562-563)