BY LALONDE AMENDMENT

Dogfighting Opponents Say Bill Gutted

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) -

The bloody sport of dogfighting is “close and dear to us,” said Rep. John John of Crowley.

“There are a lot worse things,” said Rep. Raymond “La La” Lalonde of St. Landry Parish.

“Hang in there La La,” said Rep. Margaret Lowenthal, urging Lalonde on as he fought for and finally succeeded in changing a bill to outlaw dogfighting - a change that the bill’s proponents said gutted the concept.

Lalonde and his forces also were successful in cutting off debate on the amended measure, which was approved routinely Wednesday and sent back to the Senate for concurrence in the amendment.

The amendment was approved 45-41. The bill got an 87-6 vote.

A large crowd of pit bull owners from rural areas where dogfighting occurs applauded loudly as the lower chamber voted for Lalonde’s amendment.

Lalonde got strong help from John, who said: “When you go meddling with people with a way of life, and talking about putting them in jail, you’re fooling with things that are important, meaningful for certain people. Some things have been handed down from our forefathers. They do fight dogs. It’s part of a heritage they were raised with, a thing they’re proud of...It’s wrong to change a custom close and dear to us.”

With that amendment, the only way anyone could be arrested would be if they were caught on the spot during a raid.

As originally written, the bill said that if anyone had reason to suspect that a dog had been in such a fight, a warrant could be obtained immediately. The dog could then be checked by a veterinarian for proof.

Lalonde’s amendment would say that officials would have to prove that the dog had been in a fight within 48 hours from the time the animal was picked up.

The amendment also would delay the effective date that the bill would become law, “sixty days to give the owners time to sell their dogs,” explained Lalonde.

“We can really be proud,” added Lalonde, who noted animals.

that his colleagues a few minutes earlier had read that first bill, which would have another six months to bet on dogs and let them chew each other apart.”

Rep. Ed Scogin of Slidell said the time lag on proving a fight ruined the bill. “If the owner’s got 48 hours, all he has to say is that the fight happened 49 hours ago and he’s home free,” said Scogin.

Several raids on dogfights have occurred in Louisiana. The fights, some of them to the death, generally are held in old barns in deserted areas.

Law enforcement officials have complained that it’s difficult to catch the operators of fights or dog owners on the spot, saying they need more help.

The Senate-passed bill was to have done that, said Lalonde.

He said he would ask Hickey to refuse to concur in the House amendment and see if something could be worked out by a House-Senate conference committee.

Also, the joke may be on the dogfighting enthusiasts,