Drinking Ban Proposal Approved In La. House

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A bill to ban drinking of alcohol in moving vehicles “ought to be able to stand on its own merits” when it goes to a Senate committee today, says Lafayette Rep. Ron Gomez.

It passed the House yesterday after more than 2 1/2 hours debate, but legislative watchers have predicted bigger problems in the Senate.

“I’ve no idea or no indication of what’ll happen in the Senate,” Gomez said after the 63-27 favorable House vote on the bill he authored.

“I did no personal lobbying on this at all in the House,” he said. “I really believe it should also stand on its own merits in the Senate.”

Under the provisions of the bill, the driver of a car, truck, recreational vehicle or van could be fined $125 if caught drinking a beer or mixed drink while the vehicle was moving.

In addition, a non-drinking driver could be fined if any passenger in his car was drinking alcohol.

Gomez said 13 of the 27 “nay” votes came from Acadiana legislators, but he “took no nose count as the thing went to the House floor.”

Debate was obviously hot and heavy when representatives took up the bill.

As originally written, the bill would not have covered drivers of recreational vehicles.

Rep. Hunt Downer of Houma helped lead the opposition, claiming he’d not oppose the bill with an amendment that it apply only to the driver.

Numerous other amendments and motions were attempted.

Gomez afterward, “I think every motion that could be made was made. There were ones to table the issue and even a move for adjournment at one point.”

Gomez urged legislators to “vote your conscience.”

Added Rep. Richard Baker of Baton Rouge just before the vote, “I realize this creates philosophical problems and political problems for some of you. Some don’t want to be forced to vote against it. But we can’t keep this up.”