Early Bar Closing Part Of Proposal To Combat Drunk Driving In Lafayette

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Four new laws, including a parishwide 2 a.m. closing ordinance, were part of a package of recommendations made by an Intergovernmental Task Force on Drunk Driving last night.

The committee also proposed some new programs, expanded law enforcement efforts concerning drunk driving and the creation of a public information position to coordinate public and professional information.

The formal report of suggestions ended about three months of study by the 15-member task force established by the City Council, Lafayette Parish Police Jury and Acadiana Safety Association.

Representatives of those appointing governmental bodies were among the estimated 100 people who filled the City Hall auditorium to hear the task force's recommendations.

At the beginning of the meeting, chairman Daryl Schouest stressed it was not to be a debate on a 2 a.m. closing law now under consideration by the City Council. That proposed law would force establishments which sell liquor as a primary commodity to close from 2 a.m. to 6 a.m.

The Council postponed a decision on the touchy proposal Tuesday night until it could review the Task Force report.

Police Jury president Louis Roth told The Advertiser after yesterday's meeting that a proposed 2 a.m. closing law was recently rejected by the Police Jury. Jurors said such a law would "put drunks on the road driving a further distance," he said, adding that they would be more interested if surrounding parishes would also adopt such a measure.

But, Roth said, "it probably will come up again. Some of them may change their minds."

Youth Targeted
The Task Force also recommended that possession of alcoholic beverages by persons under the age of 18 should be illegal except in the company of a parent or legal guardian.

"This recommendation is targeted at the minor driver who is able to get alcoholic beverages from various sources. The Task Force recognized that these young people often times drink and then drive. The law enforcement agencies reported that they have no probable cause to detain minors who are simply in possession of alcoholic beverages," the report states.

It also proposed that it be unlawful for liquor to be sold in "go cups" and that the state invoke mandatory revocation or restriction of driving privileges on first offense OWI cases. "Restriction rather than revocation should be allowed so that a person may continue to drive himself to and from work," the report states.

In terms of programs, the report (Continued on Page 5, Col. 1)
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states “that programs be established which can identify problem drinkers, help them in rehabilitation, monitor their progress, prepare pre-sentence investigation reports and serve as an information gathering arm of the court.”

Other recommendations include:
- Increased training for law enforcement officers on OWI enforcement.
- An additional magistrate/hearing officer or a new city judge, plus an additional part-time prosecutor and secretary.
- Creation of a permanent intergovernmental task force to monitor, evaluate and report on the OWI problem.
- Revamping the city’s OWI van, with the use of equipment such as audiovisual equipment.
- Apprehension/deterrent activities, such as periodic driver’s license checks via roadblocks.

Answer Questions

Members of the Task Force fielded questions from the audience about the task force, but debate was discouraged. Opinions nonetheless were stated and

at least once, there was a brief exchange between a representative of a loungé and task force member.

“How many bar owners are on this task force?” John Trahan, representing C’est la Guerre, asked.

“How many bar owners volunteered?” shot back Task Force member May Waggoner.

Another citizen, Harold “Smitty” Aaron, asked the Task Force rhetorically: “What’s the idea of closing (at 2 a.m.)?" He added later: “If I was addicted to drinking, 2 o’clock wouldn’t keep me from getting drunk.”

‘Quit Serving’ At 2 A.M.

Chip Abboud, director of operations for the Keg Corporation, said he’s opposed to a law which would require lounges to shut down at 2 a.m. and clear the customers out of the place. “Two o’clock, quit serving — that’s fine,” Abboud said.

But forcing patrons on the highway en masse at 2 a.m. may not serve the purpose of keeping the drunk driver off the road, he observed.

Acadiana Open Channel, which is Channel 10 on Cablevision, will broadcast a tape of yesterday’s meeting at 5:30 p.m. today and at 8:30 p.m. Monday.