**Gomez's Open Container Bill Gets Committee's OK**

BATON ROUGE — By late afternoon yesterday, Rep. Ron Gomez of Lafayette was still shaking his head in amazement.

He had managed to get his controversial open container law through the House Committee on Criminal Justice. It states it will be illegal to carry alcoholic beverages in open containers in cars or trucks on public streets.

The proposal had gone before the committee three times before. Each time, Gomez took it back to plug up the loopholes.

Committee approval means the bill will go to the House floor for a vote.

"In fact, three committee members became co-authors," Gomez said in an interview.

"I just don't think it's that bad a bill," he added.

**Cleaned Up**

The bill had been cleaned up a little before it was presented again to the committee yesterday. The changes were designed to dash arguments voice by opponents.

For example, the penalty for violation was reduced to a maximum $125 fine.

The original sentence suggested had been "too harsh," Gomez conceded.

Another problem was that if police stop a car with several passengers inside and only one drink, it would be difficult to pinpoint the guilty party.

As amended, the driver would be held responsible in such a case.

Also, open liquor containers can be carried in motor homes if they are kept in an area not directly accessible to the driver.

**Public For It**

In committee, Gomez said the bill may not be popular with some citizens in his hometown.

Noting that the law would not be effective until Jan. 1, 1983, he quipped, "That will just give other candidates time to file for the District 44 House seat" (Gomez's district).

However, the Lafayette City Council adopted a similar ordinance Tuesday night.

Gomez's bill is expected to be voted on in the House in about 10 days.

A recent statewide opinion poll in-

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**Gomez's Open**

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dicated that 77 percent of all citizens polled favored a law which would prohibit drinking while driving.

The drunk driving legislation considered by lawmakers this session shows an attitude and intent to respond to public opinion about the problem, Gomez said.

Statistics indicate that about 600 people died as a result of drunk drivers last year and about 40,000 were injured in alcohol-related accidents.

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