House approves increase in drinking age to 21

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — The House of Representatives gritted its teeth Tuesday and approved a Senate-passed bill to increase the drinking age to 21, but even proponents acknowledged the measure was full of loopholes.

The House has killed similar measures in past years but was closer this time to losing at least $15 million in federal highway funds.

The federal government says any state that doesn't have such a law by Oct. 1, 1988 will lose its federal aid money.

Louisiana's loss would come in the 1987-88 fiscal year, which begins in October, 1987.

The measure was approved 78-25 and now goes back to the Senate for approval of a routine amendment.

Gov. Edwin Edwards pushed the bill and is expected to sign it into law.

"I still think this law creates a class of second-class citizens but some of us will hold our noses and vote for it," said Rep. Robert Adley, D-Bossier City.

Under the measure, most people in the affected age bracket — 18 to 21 — will be able to buy liquor until Oct. 1, 1988. Some, who will be 20 at that time, will have to wait a year.

The bill also says that age bracket can continue to drink in residences, private clubs, with their parents or with their spouses of legal drinking age.

The fine for violating the law would be $50 and handled like a traffic ticket.

Rep. Jim Donelon, R-Metairie, complained that the seller is let off the hook under the bill, but was unable to get enough support to amend it.

"We shouldn't have a watered-down, loophole-filled bill like this," he said. "The people want a strong law. We are pulling the wool over their eyes."

Rep. Margaret Lowenthal, D-Lake Charles, handled the Senate measure on the House floor and said she had "53 good reasons why you should vote for this." She waved a packet, saying it contained State Police records showing that 53 persons have been killed in auto accidents since Jan. 1 because of persons in the 18-21 bracket who were drinking at the time.