House rejects warning labels on alcoholic drink containers

By MARSHA SHULER
Capitol news bureau

Louisiana's drinking public won't see labels on alcoholic beverage containers warning them of the potential health hazards of liquor consumption.

The proposal died at the hands of the Louisiana House on Wednesday. Only 30 representatives voted for the measure while 58 rejected the idea.

"This is not a moral issue. It's a health and safety issue. I think it's a way we can save lives in Louisiana," said Rep. Dale Smith, D-Pollock.

He said the federal government requires labels on cigarettes warning of potential health effects of smoking, but has failed to do so on alcoholic beverages, which are potentially just as hazardous.

"Carl's over there smoking right now. He knows what it's going to do to him," Smith said, gesturing toward Rep. Carl Gunter, D-Pineville, who was puffing away.

"All I'm asking is that the alcohol industry be responsible," said Smith, who as part of his presentation showed colleagues a five-minute film about "fetal alcohol syndrome" caused by alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

Smith said alcohol consumption during pregnancy is the third-leading cause of birth defects. He said it is the only cause that is "entirely preventable."

Before the vote, Rep. Charles Emile "Peppi" Bruneau, R-New Orleans, tried to get the House to shelve the bill through a parliamentary procedure, but couldn't get lawmakers to go along.

"I thought prohibition had been repealed. I have no problem with folk who have a problem with the use of alcohol, but they should attack that issue straight up," Bruneau said.

Bruneau also said the legislation would have a negative financial impact on the state because it may cut into the supply of liquor sold here and the taxes paid on it.

Gunter said he was backing the bill because his wife wanted him to.

"I asked her if she thought we should label eggs and dairy products because they contain cholesterol," he said. "She said 'no' because they are not addictive."

Here's how the House voted when it killed the bill, HB30, aimed at putting warning labels on alcoholic beverage containers:

