Legislature OKs drinking age bill

By MARSHA SHULER
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The Louisiana Senate gave final legislative approval to Tuesday to raising the state's legal drinking age from 18 to 21 as it agreed to House changes in the measure.
The Senate voted 28-6 to concur in House amendments and send the bill to Gov. Edwin Edwards for his signature. Edwards has said he will sign the bill into law.

When the bill takes effect March 15, Louisiana will no longer be the only state in which 18-year-olds can buy liquor.

But the bill provides a grandfather clause to allow anyone born before Oct. 1, 1977, to buy and consume alcoholic beverages. In effect, people 19 and a half when the law takes effect can drink legally.

Another exception allows 18-, 19- and 20-year-olds to drink in private homes and clubs, while in the company of parents, spouses or guardians age 21 or older, and for medical and religious reasons.

The approval by the Senate came a short time after the House amended and passed the bill. In several previous legislative attempts the House has balked at raising the legal drinking age.

The House voted 78-25 for the bill, SB11 by Sen. Richard Neeson, D-Shreveport. Some proponents of raising the drinking age--say the bill, SB11, does not go far enough because of the exception--because it provides only minor fines for 18-, 19- and 20-year-olds who purchase or possess alcohol and because it provides no penalty for the seller or server.

"It's a watered-down, loophole-filled bill," said Rep. Jim Donelon, D-Shreveport. Some proponents of raising the drinking age--say the bill, SB11, does not go far enough because of the exception--because it provides only minor fines for 18-, 19- and 20-year-olds who purchase or possess alcohol and because it provides no penalty for the seller or server.

Here is how the House voted 78-25 for a bill that would raise to 21 the legal age for the purchase or public consumption of alcoholic beverages.