LAWMAKERS CRITICIZE PROPOSAL

Plan To Increase DWI Patrols Draws Fire

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — A new State Police project to step up DWI patrols in five parishes, including Lafayette, and a new law calling for suspension of driver's licenses in DWI cases has drawn fire from some legislators.

However, the Joint Legislative Committee on the Budget, representing a cross section of the 144 lawmakers, funded both the new project and the new law.

Members of the House-Senate panel Wednesday groaned in protest when the administration's chief fiscal officer indicated they might be changing their minds about strict enforcement of DWI laws.

"I am hearing negative reasons why State Police should not go after drunk drivers," Ralph Perlman, the fiscal officer, had said.

The matters came up during committee consideration of funds for the project and to help enforce the new law.

The first issue concerned a transfer of just over $200,000 from the highway safety council to State Police so that four-man DWI teams in vans can step up drinking driving arrests.

Targeted are five parishes which lead the state in accidents on state highways involving drinking: Lafayette, Lafourche, Terrebonne, St. Tammany and East Baton Rouge.

High Accident Rate Here

In a two-year period ending in 1982, Lafayette Parish had 470 accidents in which drinking was involved, State Police said. Lafourche also had 470, Terrebonne had 419, St. Tammany had 379 and East Baton Rouge, 345.

Sen. Leonard Chabert, who represents Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes, took offense that his area was being targeted, complaining that the State Police figures don't include arrests by city police and that other areas of the state could have higher DWI arrest figures.

"Some of us represent more than one parish and you pick one parish and we'll have people in that parish say that we're picking on them," said Sen. B. B. "Sixty" Rayburn of Bogalusa, who represents St. Tammany as well as Washington Parish.

"I'll have all the barroom people (in St. Tammany) calling me, saying they're hurting their business by chasing customers to another parish," he added. "I just want to know what to tell them."

Rayburn, Chabert and others said state police should get complete figures, including arrests within municipalities.

People in those five parishes are going to get the word and go elsewhere to drink, they said.

One-Year Program

"We hope to impact the number of drinking accidents," said Lt. Bobby Acord of State Police. "This is a one year program. It doesn't mean we're not catching people in other areas."

He said the vans would operate on Friday and Saturday nights between the hours of 5 p.m. and 3 a.m.

The other issue involved giving State Police just over $200,000 to help administer a new law involving seizure of licenses of drunk drivers.

If a driver registers .10 on the breath test or refuses to take the test, the officer seizes the license immediately.

The drivers lose their licenses for 90 days but get the right to challenge the seizure before an administrative panel of State Police officials.

That means more paperwork for State Police and that means a need for more money.

The budget committee was told that the (Continued on Page 5, Col. 1)

Rep. Joe Delpit, also of Baton Rouge and acknowledged by his colleagues to be a hardliner against drinking driving, said the law won't work.

"This is not going to reduce DWI's," he said. "It's a waste of taxpayers' money. We ought to be giving these people treatment. I know 1983 was an election year and MADD was down here beating the door, but I think we went too far." He referred to Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

"They (State Police) are just responding to a law passed by you," said Perlman.

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new law is silent on whether a motorist can be considered a hardship case and thus be given a temporary license to go to and from work.

"I can see it now," said Rep. Kevin Reilly of Baton Rouge. "People will get laid off or lose their jobs."