Senate Drunk Driving Amendments Rejected

Baton Rouge, La. (AP) - The House on Friday rejected Senate amendments to the administration's major bill of the session to crack down on drunk drivers. A compromise now must be worked out by a House-Senate conference committee.

The unanimous vote to reject the amendments to the House bill marked the first time this session that a bill has been thrown into conference committee.

As the session winds down, more and more bills will be sent to six-member conference committees — three House members and three senators.

When a conference committee works out a settlement, both houses must accept the committee's report or the bill dies.

No further action on the bill will be taken until next week since the Senate conferees can't be appointed until Monday. The Senate recessed for the week on Thursday.

Rep. Eldridge Morris of DeRidder, the prime author of the bill, said that he was most concerned about one Senate amendment, which would require district attorneys to file written reasons for reducing DWI charges or not prosecuting.

"I have been told that this might be unconstitutional," he said of the amendment.

A House committee earlier this week killed a separate bill which would have required the district attorneys to file reasons.

The Senate also made one other major change: As the bill left the House, a first offense violater would serve at least a minimum of two days in jail or, at the judge's discretion, be forced to work on community service projects for 10 days. The Senate reduced the community service sentence to four days.

The House approved the bill 39-0 on Wednesday, along with six other Senate bills aimed at getting the drunk driver off of Louisiana's highways. The six other bills will be heard in House committees next week.

Highway safety experts have estimated that half of Louisiana's 1,200 high fatalities last year involved drunk drivers. The state ranks No. 2 nationally in the number of fatalities where a drunk driver was involved.