

Texas House refuses debate on alcohol bill

United Press International
AUSTIN — The Texas House Wednesday overwhelmingly rejected a move to force a committee to allow floor debate on a bill banning open containers of alcoholic beverages in automobiles.

The House Liquor Regulation Committee had voted 6-3 Tuesday against the measure, killing it for the remainder of the legislative session.

Rep. Carlyle Smith, D-Grand Prairie, a sponsor of the open container law, Wednesday attempted a rarely-used — and even more rarely successful — parliamentary move to force the committee to report the bill to the full House for debate. Smith's effort failed by a vote of 22-17.

Opponents of the move argued it would disrupt the traditional House committee system and set a bad precedent, while Smith claimed the move was necessary to allow consideration of a crucial bill.

Tuesday, members of the Liquor Regulation Committee rejected the challenge of member Larry Shaw, D-Big Spring, to make a "potent, positive impact" on Texans' attitudes toward

drinking and driving by approving the bill.

The committee voted 6-3 to reject Shaw's compromise proposal, authored in subcommittee and much less restrictive than the original measure. Shaw's substitute bill would have prohibited consumption of an alcoholic beverage by a person operating a motor vehicle.

Violation would have been a Class C misdemeanor, punishable by a maximum \$200 fine.

The vote against the bill came after Rep. Erwin Barton, D-Pasadena, moved to make the bill more unpalatable to more members by amending it to also prohibit those operating boats and airplanes from consuming alcoholic beverages.

Barton's amendment failed to pass, but the only three votes against it came from the committee members who voted for passage of the measure to the full House.

Shaw's bill would not have banned open alcoholic beverage containers from the entire passenger compartments of motor vehicles, as the earlier version did. A similar bill passed by a Senate committee but awaiting floor debate would outlaw open

alcoholic beverage containers within 5 feet of a driver.

"We're not beat," proclaimed Marinelle Timmons, the state director of Mothers Against Drunk Drivers. "It would have been more suitably received in another committee."

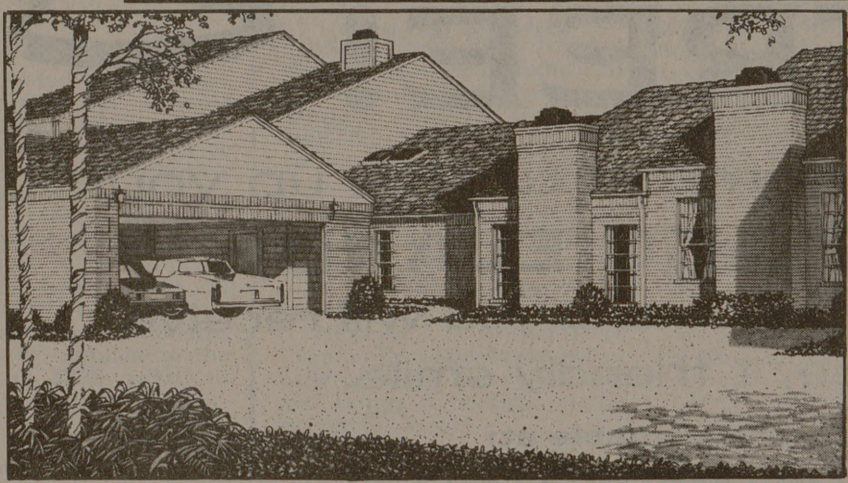
"This was an unfavorable committee," said Timmons, who last week accused the committee of delaying tactics designed to kill the measure.

Supporters of legislation to strengthen state drunken driving laws have termed an open container law the cornerstone of the legislative package. Last week Lewis sent a letter to committee chairman Rep. Billy Hall, D-Laredo, requesting that the full House membership be given the chance to vote on the law.

Hall, Shaw and Rep. Frank Tejada, D-San Antonio, voted for the measure. The opposition was led by Rep. Froy Salinas, R-Lubbock.

"This is not the answer," Salinas said. "I think it is bad public policy."

Salinas said the Legislature should try to address the problem of driving while intoxicated by strengthening existing laws.



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PUC may get look at rate requests

United Press International
AUSTIN — Hoping to get a peek at Southwestern Bell Telephone Co.'s plans for a massive rate hike request, the Public Utility Commission is looking into how the company will handle the breakup of its parent company.

PUC spokesman Rick Hainline said Tuesday the inquiry would give the commission staff a chance to get a jump on Bell's strategy for a reported record \$1 billion rate increase request it plans to file this summer.

Bell officials confirmed at a legislative hearing last week that the utility was preparing a rate

request in the range of \$1 billion.

Under the court-ordered divestiture of American Telephone & Telegraph Co. on Jan. 1, 1984, Southwestern Bell will provide local service and "access" lines for long distance service.

Long distance service would be furnished by AT&T in competition with long distance specialty companies, such as MCI and U.S. Telephone.

The PUC asked Southwestern Bell to file testimony on its proposed access charges no later than May 23, and intervenors must file by May 31. A second hearing was set for June 8.

Oil show exhibits banned for 1984

United Press International
HOUSTON — Because of the economic pinch in the oil and gas industry worldwide, the 1984 Offshore Technology Conference executive committee voted Tuesday to hold only a technical conference next year, but restart the traditional technical conference-exhibition in 1985 at the Astrodome complex.

The changes in the OTC schedule are "responsive to the conditions of the offshore and oil and gas industries," said Donald G. Russell, committee chairman.

"The offshore industry and the oil and gas industry worl-

divide are in a state of adjustment to the decline in demand and prices for oil and gas worldwide," Russell said.

"The Offshore Technology Conference was established in 1969 for technology exchange purposes," he said. "The decisions taken by the OTC executive committee represent evidence of OTC's continued commitment to ensure that OTC is responsive to this industry's needs."

The 15th Annual OTC, which runs through today, this year experienced a 35 percent decline in attendance and a drop in exhibit space.

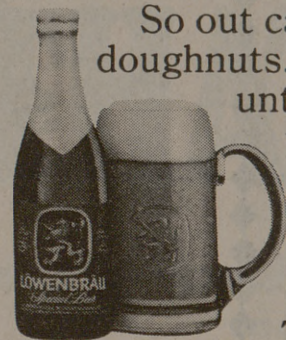
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