

Ferdie J. Deering

MAY 15 1984

# Increase in Drunken Driving Ahead?

THE Oklahoma Transportation Commission has announced it will spend twice as much for road construction during the next fiscal year. That doesn't necessarily promise greater safety.

Other actions could make our new highways and bridges, as well as older thoroughfares, more dangerous than ever.

One is the scheduled election in September to legalize liquor-by-the-drink. Liquor interests are prepared to spend more money than ever before to persuade voters that Oklahomans ought to drink more liquor by making it more readily available.

Opponents to increased sales of bottled disease and death in the form of alcoholic beverages cannot match those large expenditures. Many people may be misled by the flood of propaganda that may be expected from distillers and retailers.

The governor's fence-straddling attitude leaves the state without official leadership to protect the people from more drunken driving. Most legislators lack stature and/or courage to stand up against the

money-laden liquor lobbyists.

The legislature also has approved in a joint House-Senate conference committee a so-called anti-drunken driving bill that would weaken what little law enforcement now exists against it.

The bill would increase the fine for driving under suspension of licenses from \$50 to \$200. Offenders with money or influence now usually escape prison punishment and this would not keep them from literally buying their freedom in the future.

Under the pretext of alleviating crowded prisons the measure also would allow release of individuals convicted of what are politely called "alcohol related offenses" to the Department of Mental Health. Treat them, not punish them, is the idea.

Only those deemed to be "security risks" would be retained in prison. As in the past, this probably would not include members of the legislature and other public officials, prominent business men, movie stars, or friends of the court or parole board.

One feature of the measure would legalize use of highway road blocks by law enforcement officials to check for "alcohol related offenses." But what is the point in arresting drunken drivers if they are to be fined, turned over to the Department of Health which may have no more room for them than state prisons do, and then allow them to be turned loose to drink and drive again?

Laws against restaurants and bars serving liquor-by-the-drink are seldom, if ever, enforced now. Legalizing such practice will not result in "more honesty" but in more intoxication.

Supporters of the campaign for more liquor-by-the-drink have used the slogan "Let's Be Honest." That's a good idea. Let us be honest about the objectives.

The honest truth is that liquor distillers and retailers want to make more money by selling more liquor, regardless of the effects it may have on human lives, safety, health and families.

# Legislators Entertaining

MAY 27 1984.

TO THE EDITOR:

Two or three weeks ago I was watching educational television and was "treated" to a session of the Oklahoma House of Representatives.

I was impressed with a general lack of showmanship. In fact, I got the direct impression that a three-ring circus was in progress.

Your editorial policies were attacked by the Speaker of the House, and he hinted of some type of legislation in the future to restrain your opinions.

As a strong advocate of the Bill of Rights of the United States Constitution, I urge the citizens of Oklahoma to be on guard against laws passed by state legislators hampering freedom of the press.

Moreover, I applaud your stand regarding the legislators. They are entertaining, but seem bent on taxing your state in a time when no citizen needs more taxes.

Larry K. Wilson  
Fort Smith, Ark.

## Columnist Irks Reader

TO THE EDITOR:

Mr. Deering is having a real problem with facts about our effort to legalize liquor by the drink in Oklahoma.

First, we are offended by his statement, "Liquor interests are prepared to spend more money than ever before to persuade voters that Oklahomans ought to drink more liquor by making it more readily available." This is wrong. We are simply trying to tax and legislate what is already in effect, and the last state in this country so to do. I demand that he prove that it is our effort to persuade anyone to drink more.

About the only truth in the article is "laws against restaurants and bars serving liquor-by-the-drink are

seldom, if ever, enforced now." The main reason is the law now. Who is supposed to enforce the law? The state ABC only has a handful of agents to enforce. The additional taxes and licensing will give teeth and funds to enforce.

We have not accepted any money from "liquor distillers" and the retailers have nothing to gain one way or the other.

The honest business community and chambers of commerce members resent Mr. Deering's comments. We feel that proper legislation can be accomplished. We are against roadies and drunk drivers and support the MADD causes. Why doesn't Mr. Deering come up with a substitute solution for the present conditions that now exist? Apparently he is delighted with what is going on in our state now. We aren't and are trying to be honest.

John Kilpatrick

City

## Watkins Flip-Flops

TO THE EDITOR:

The circus opened in Madison Square Garden without our Third District congressman, Wes Watkins. What a shame! For Wes Watkins is one of the neatest flip-floppers in or out of the circus. And he can change colors from true blue conservative to red hot liberal with the magic of a sideshow chameleon.

I'm sure that Speaker Tip O'Neill and Sen. George McGovern think of Wes Watkins as one of their best new liberal leaders. They can't remember that Congressman Watkins was ever a conservative.

For last year — and so far this one — Wes Watkins has mightily pleased these Democrat powers that be. The Honorable Watkins has voted for abortions paid with federal taxes, for a nuclear freeze, and for the second Equal Rights Amendment (just like the first one), for canceling money to Nicaraguans who are fighting their communist rulers, and for a two-year budget with 86 percent (or \$96 billion) of the cuts to be taken out of the defense department and 14 percent (or \$16 billion) of the cuts to be divided among the other 12 departments.

Circuses can use quick changers.

## Prayer for Today

LET us come to you, Lord, to humbly thank you for using our minds, our faces, our eyes, heart and hands to help bring your love and healing grace to others. Amen.

**Let's Be Honest, Kilpatrick**

TO THE EDITOR:

John Kilpatrick apparently wants Ferdie Deering to be honest. Mr. Kilpatrick should take his own advice. I submit that Deering was closer to the truth than Kilpatrick.

The Deering editorial rightly concluded that liquor-by-the-drink would mean higher profits for the sellers and higher consumption among private citizens. Unless all the laws of economics and marketing have been repealed, his conclusions are correct.

Kilpatrick, on the other hand, says State Question 563 would bring better law enforcement and more taxes. I wonder if he has read the petition he and his organization paid circulators thousands of dollars to circulate. It contains no taxes on liquor-by-the-drink. On the contrary, it limits what taxes the legislature can levy. The only enforcement provision it has is a name change for the ABC Board and two new political appointees.

**Richard T. McCartney, City**