

Ferdie J. Deering

DEC 6 1984

There's Confusion in Liquor Business

PECULIAR things are happening on the way "more liquor by more drinks" that Oklahomans legalized this year. They're not funny.

Legislative committees are having a merry-go-round trying to write laws to regulate saloons and collect the wealth of tax revenue promised by "Honest Johns" and chambers of commerce during the referendum campaign.

In my opinion, it doesn't make a great deal of difference how they write the laws because if history repeats itself they won't be well-enforced anyway. No liquor law ever has been.

John Volpe, chairman of the National Commission Against Drunk Driving and former U.S. secretary of transportation, pointed to the crux of the alcoholism problem in Oklahoma City when he said accidents involving drunken drivers will continue until Americans change their attitudes toward drinking and driving.

Harold Hughes of Iowa, former U.S. senator and recovered alcoholic, said the same day that alcohol-

ism is costing Oklahoma \$1 billion a year.

It will take a lot of liquor taxes to offset those costs. Alcoholism is blamed for higher medical expenses, higher crime rates and other adverse side-effects in addition to highway accidents.

The Oklahoma Restaurant Association is to be commended for discouraging and opposing practices among its members "which might be perceived as fostering intoxication." Justin Hill, executive vice president of ORA, says that its board of directors has taken an official position against happy hours, some of which offer unlimited drinks and otherwise promote heavy drinking. Patrons generally get into cars and drive away even if so "happy" they're cockeyed.

What authorities on alcoholism are saying and have been saying all along is that we pay a high price for getting "high."

Putting it more positively, if Oklahomans didn't drink so much liquor and beer, public costs of medical care would be less, prisons

would not be overcrowded, more people would be working at productive jobs, fewer persons would be killed on our highways, and more families would live together in happiness and peace.

Drunkenness and hangovers are causes of absenteeism from jobs, countless errors, and related expenses in the business world. It seems that business people would be opposed to alcoholism.

Yet, figures compiled by Dartnell Institute of Business Research in Chicago indicate that bottles of liquor are retaining popularity as Christmas gifts for employees.

Dartnell spokesmen said employers' and corporations' giving is up generally, with turkeys, hams, fruits and other foods in first place, followed by money and personal gifts, all ahead of liquor.

But the biggest jump is in liquor gifts. It is hard to see why any smart business operator or anyone else would give an employee or friend something that could cause loss of job, loss of family, loss of health, and even loss of life.