

## STATE HOUSE LOWERS THE BOOM ON UNDERAGE DRUNK DRIVERS

From House Media

■(OKLAHOMA CITY) The Oklahoma House of Representatives voted — without opposition — to lower the boom on drivers under the age of 21 who illegally use alcohol or other controlled dangerous substances.

The House approved **Senate Bill 1230** on a 97-0 vote Friday and sent the measure to the Governor. Rep. Laura Boyd, D-Norman, sponsored the measure along with Sen. Ben Brown, D-Oklaoma City, and Sen. Helen Cole, R-Moore.

"This bill seeks to stop underage drinking and driving, but more importantly, it seeks to prevent it in the first place," Boyd said. "This bill really is 'zero tolerance' for the first time."

Drivers under the age of 21 who have "any measurable quantity" of alcohol in their blood, or who exhibit evidence of being under the influence of any other intoxicating substance, would lose their license for six months.

A blood alcohol level of as low as .02 percent would be grounds for suspension. A single beer would register a .02 percent blood alcohol level.

On a first offense, violators of the law would be fined from between \$100 and \$500, or ordered to complete 20 hours of community service, or the complete a treatment program. The violator could be punished by any combination of the above sanctions.

On a second or subsequent offense, the fine could be as high as \$1,000 or by completion of 40 hours of community service, or treatment.

Boyd said the bill was important because even though drivers under the age of 21 make up only 9 percent of the population, they are involved in 16 percent of fatal traffic accidents. Eight of every 10 accidents involving drivers under the age of 21 are alcohol related.

Besides lowering the boom, Boyd said the treatment authorized under the bill could help a young person avoid destroying their life with drugs or alcohol.

"Anything we can do to turn a young person around pays huge dividends in the future," she said.

Passage of the measure also assures pro-

tection of \$11 million in federal funds allocated to Oklahoma for 1998. The federal government has mandated states pass a bill to curb underage drinking and driving or risk a portion of the dollars allocated to them.

Boyd said she expects Governor Keating to sign the bill into law.

## FARM BUREAU COMMENDS BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

From Oklahoma Farm Bureau

■(OKLAHOMA CITY) The Oklahoma Board of Agriculture's unanimous decision May 22 not to impose a ban on grain shipments or custom harvesters from states under Karnal bunt quarantine was commended by Oklahoma Farm Bureau.

"We appreciate the leadership Agriculture Secretary Dennis Howard and the Board of Agriculture exhibited by making the no quarantine decision," said Eldon Merklin, Farm Bureau president.

The Board of Agriculture adopted a resolution supporting the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) efforts to control Karnal bunt. The resolution also omitted a state-imposed quarantine on grain or equipment from areas known to be infected with Karnal bunt.

"The imposition of an Oklahoma ban would have sent an erroneous message to our trading partners that our national system does not work to guarantee the safety and wholesomeness of the American food supply," said Merklin.

The United States exports in excess of \$4 billion worth of wheat annually, with much of the supply coming from Oklahoma hard red winter wheat producers.

Merklin also commended the Board of Agriculture for taking steps to compile a list of custom cutters who have been in Karnal bunt infected areas. Those cutters will be checked, and if approved, certified as Karnal bunt free.

"Oklahoma producers now can contact the state Department of Agriculture to make sure the custom cutter entering their field has been certified as Karnal bunt free," said Merklin.

"Farm Bureau also believes our state wheat growers should exercise caution when they purchase seed wheat for next year's crop," he concluded. "Producers should ask their suppliers where the seed was produced and obtain assurances it did not come from a Karnal bunt infected area."

## SENATE ASSURES CONTINUED FUNDING FOR OMBUDSMAN CARE PROGRAM FOR ELDERLY

From Senate Media

■(OKLAHOMA CITY) Friday, the state Senate passed a measure designed to protect the rights of nursing home residents should the Congress in Washington DC cut the funding for Oklahoma's Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program.

The ombudsman program trains and supervises a network of more than 240 volunteers, who spend at least four hours a week monitoring nursing home care and serving as advocates for nursing home residents.

Senator Jim Maddox, author of the original ombudsman measure, said **Senate Bill 1177** guarantees full funding for the ombudsman program if its funds are cut at the federal level.

"Older Americans have made our country and our state what they are today," said Maddox, D-Lawton. "As our populations ages, our nursing homes are serving more people who are in more frail condition than in the past. We must fund the ombudsman program to ensure that these men and women receive the high-quality of care they need and deserve."

Maddox said Congress is considering cutting about \$50,000 from the funding of Oklahoma's ombudsman program.

Under SB1177, the state will replace any federal funds cut from the Ombudsman program.

"Fifty-thousand dollars is a small price to pay for the welfare of Oklahoma's seniors," said Maddox.

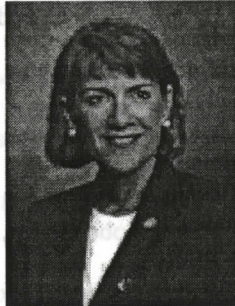
The bill now awaits final consideration in the House of Representatives.

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limited to low land use density, absence of any school or residential subdivision requiring direct traffic flow from the highway, coupled with low highway traffic and a scarcity of retail and commercial businesses along the highway.

The commissioner of public safety is authorized to grant the special law enforcement authority.

Department of Transportation officials were unable to comment on the bill, stating it was a legislative matter that has yet to be resolved.

The bill is expected to appear before the House next week.



Rep. Laura Boyd