

Lawmakers moving on DWI bills

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Gov. Mario Cuomo and majority members of both houses agree that stronger medicine is needed to cure a recurring New York State hangover — motorists who abuse drugs and alcohol. Now they have to agree on the remedy.

In recent weeks, the Assembly and Senate have proposed and passed a series of DWI bills.

Although they agree in principle, there has been little inter-house debate or endorsement. There have, however, been overtones of cooperative efforts.

Joseph Landry, spokesman for the Assembly Transportation Committee, said meetings between the governor and both houses are being scheduled to "find a common ground for legislation."

Senate Majority Leader Ralph Marino, RC-Muttontown, said legislation passed in the Senate takes action on the highways "where safety is of the utmost importance."

Assembly Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Committee Chair John Brian Murtaugh,

D-Manhattan, supports reform because "the present DWI laws have worked well for the social drinker, not the alcoholic."

Chuck Porcari, spokesman for Gov. Mario Cuomo, said the governor proposed legislation of his own that was pushed through the Senate by Sen. Michael Tully, RC-Port Washington. This bill would require mandatory revocation of driver licenses for drug-dealing convictions involving the use of an automobile.

Landry said passage of this bill may be partially motivated by federal incentive in the form of the "Solomon Amendment," named for U. S. Rep. Gerald B. Solomon of New York.

According to Landry, in order to receive certain federal highway dollars each state is required to either pass a similar law, or have both houses and the governor agree to a resolution stating their disapproval.

Landry said the Assembly is negotiating components of the Senate proposal.

Other proposals recently passed in the Senate include:

- requiring stricter punishment for individuals convicted of drunk driving with a child on board, sponsored by Sen.

Norman Levy, RC-Merrick.

- mandatory five-year license suspensions for repeat drunk driving offenders, sponsored by Sen. Dean Skelos, R-Rockville Center.

- Severe penalties for disobeying license sanctions imposed for DWI or DWAI offenses, sponsored by Levy.

- Prohibit the courts from wiping out DWI or DWAI by sentencing the defendant to adjournment in contemplation of dismissal, sponsored by Levy.

The Senate has taken the position that it wants to "keep dangerous drivers where they belong — off the roads."

Murtaugh agrees that a stronger message is needed.

"When the driver is picked up he probably did it 100 times, but got picked up on the 101st time."

Murtaugh anteed up his own piece of legislation that would require a screening and referral process for motorists with multiple DWI offenses.

Landry said any legislation passed this session will be different from any proposal on the table now. He also pointed out that "DWI legislation takes awhile to pass."