

Opinions

Hasty backs 21 drinking age



Watching
By Paul T. O'Connor

Bad news for teens who like to drink beer and wine. The battle over whether the drinking age will be raised to 21 appears to be over. Now, the only question seems to be which approach to a higher drinking age the legislature will take.

Three bills raising the drinking age to 21 were filed in the House during the first three weeks of the legislative session and the sentiment around the halls of the General Assembly appears to be that one will most certainly pass.

Two other bills are similar. House Bill 3, introduced by Rep. Dan Lilley, D-Lenoir, would raise the drinking age to 21 on July 1, 1985.

House Bill 9, introduced Rep. Pete Hasty, D-Robeson, who also represents Hoke County, would raise the drinking age to 20 on Sept. 30, 1985, and to 21 on Sept. 30, 1986.

House Bill 101, introduced by Rep. George Miller, D-Durham, is a bit more complicated. It raises the drinking age to 21 on Oct. 1, 1986. It also includes a special provision which would have the drinking age lowered back to 19 if a federal court or Congress should overrule an action taken by Congress last year.

It is the congressional action, The Service Transportation and Uniform Relocation Assistance Act of 1984, which is the impetus for the effort to raise the drinking age in North Carolina. (The drinking age for hard liquor is already 21. These bills would affect only beer and wine.) In that act, the Congress says that any state which doesn't have a 21 drinking age by

considered amendments to the Safe Roads Act.

In Miller's bill, there's a special clause that says the drinking age will go back to 19 if a court rules the 1984 congressional action unconstitutional.

Under the 21st amendment, the states have the authority to regulate drinking. There is a federal case currently pending that argues that Congress overstepped its authority in trying to coerce the states to raise their drinking ages.

Still, Miller does not rule out the possibility of supporting a higher drinking age even if the congressional action is overruled. He says the legislature should give the question a thorough study.

In 1983, attaching a higher drinking age to the Safe Roads Act may have killed the entire bill, he said. In 1985, and maybe again in 1987, the issue of the drinking age should be decided on its own merits, he said.

Editor's Note: Paul T. O'Connor, 33, is the Raleigh political columnist for the 45 members of the N.C. Association of Afternoon Newspapers. O'Connor, a resident of Cary, has covered state politics since 1979.

Oct. 1, 1986 will lose 5% of its federal highway funds in fiscal 1987 and 10% every year afterwards. For North Carolina, that means \$9.2 million the first year and \$18.4 million every year afterwards.

In an interview, Lilley said the threat of the funds cut-off provides the legislature with the encouragement to raise the drinking age. "With the importance of roads to our economy, the General Assembly will not want to give up that money," he said.

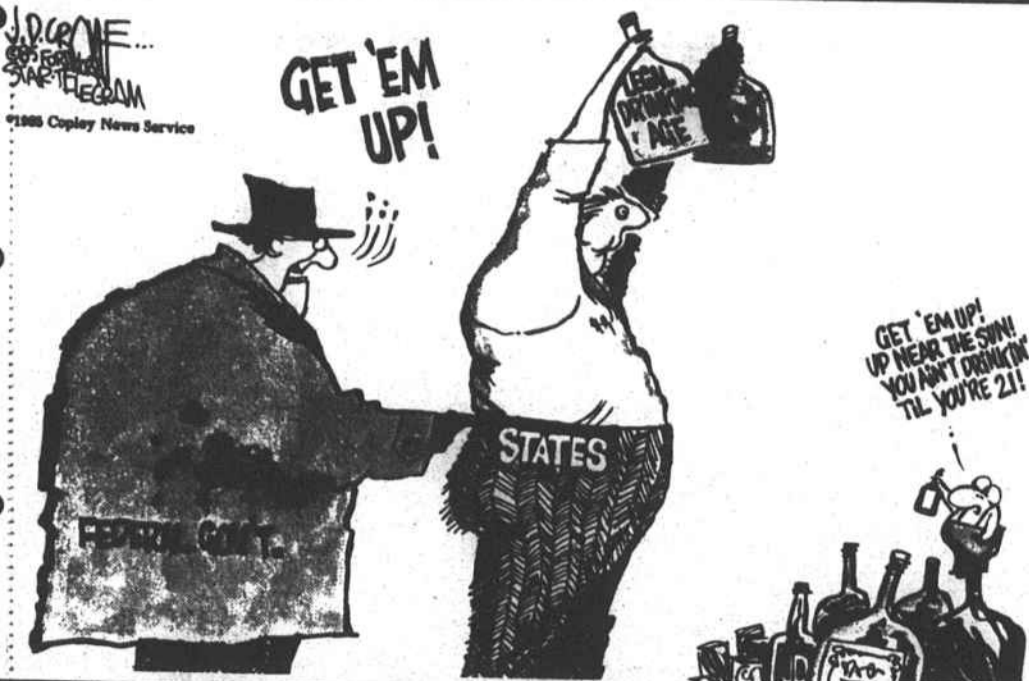
But while Lilley and Hasty agree that the road money is important, they also want the drinking age raised for other reasons.

Hasty says, it's inconsistent to have two different drinking ages, that the state is encouraging beer and wine drinking, in a way, with the lower drinking ages for those beverages.

Lilley added that research in states where the drinking age has been raised appears to bear out the contention that a higher drinking age will result in fewer traffic deaths.

Miller isn't so certain about the traffic safety argument, and he concedes that he filed his bill so the state won't lose the federal money.

In 1983, Miller voted against the 21 drinking age when the House



Letter To The Editor

Relatives sought

To the Editor:
I am trying to locate my long lost cousins in North Carolina. These people would be descendants of John Purcell (1773-1850) who lived in Robeson County most of his life.
I am especially interested in corresponding with descendants of Malcolm Purcell (1799-1878) who was the first child of John Purcell. The Purcell's are known to have

been prominent citizens in Cumberland County, Scotland, Hoke, Robeson and Bladen counties.

In addition, I would like to obtain one or more copies of the book *Lumber River Scots and Their Descendants: The McLeans, The Torreys, The Purcells, The McIntyres and The Gilchris*. This family history was published in 1942 by the William Byrd Press in Richmond, Virginia.

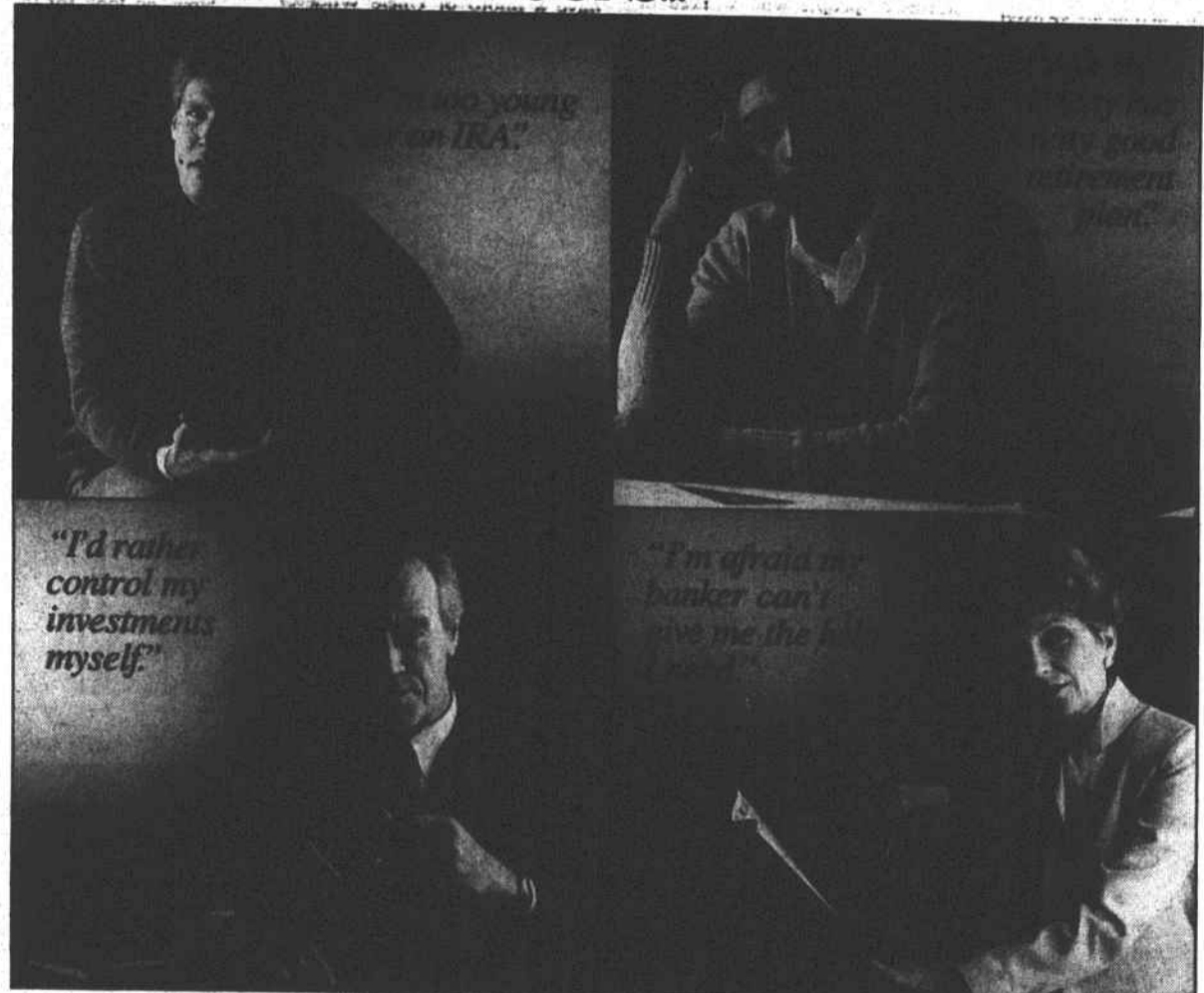
Many North Carolina families, with the above mentioned sur-

names, are likely to have copies of this book. I, of course, would be happy to pay a reasonable price for any or all books offered to me.

The information that I receive, as a result of this query, will be kept on file for a possible update of the *Lumber River Scots*.

Sincerely,
Douglas Clare Purcell
205-687-9787
633 North Randolph Ave.
Eufaula, Ala. 36027

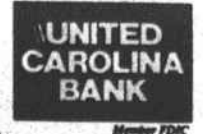
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