

# Oregon court approves ballot title for liquor privatization

By Kristena Hansen  
Associated Press

PORTLAND (AP) — Oregonians are one step closer to deciding this fall whether they want to buy liquor at the same places they already can grab a bottle of wine or six-pack of beer.

The state Supreme Court on Thursday approved the title language of a November ballot proposal that would allow grocery stores to stock their shelves with distilled liquor across Oregon, where there are currently more places to buy legal recreational marijuana than a bottle of Jack Daniels.

Grocers behind the measure now have the go-ahead to begin gathering 88,100-plus required signatures by July, the final step to put Initiative 71, dubbed Oregonians for Competition, before voters

this fall.

It's certainly not the first fight grocers have waged against Oregon's Prohibition-era monopoly — among about 18 states that still control distribution and sales through a limited number of state-run liquor stores — but grocers say they're confident more than ever this year.

**We believe Oregonians are ready to end the state's monopoly on liquor sales...**

**— Lynn Gust**

"We believe Oregonians are ready to end the state's monopoly on liquor sales and allow Oregon consumers to buy liquor at qualified grocery and retail stores — just like

consumers do in most other states," Lynn Gust, a co-sponsor of the measure and retired president of Portland-based Fred Meyer Stores, said in a statement. "The initiative will allow the state to focus more on alcohol law enforcement, which is what Oregon voters originally intended the (Oregon Liquor Control Commission) to do."

But the clash between grocers concerned with their bottom lines and small distilleries worried about shelf space at big grocery chains that often arises from privatization efforts is playing out again in Oregon.

Oregonians Against the Takeover — a coalition formed by the Associated Liquor Stores of Oregon, Oregon Beer & Wine Distributors Association and East Bend Liquor, among a

handful of others — argues liquor costs would soar as they have in Washington state, which privatized in 2011 and now boasts among the highest prices in the country.

It also says the measure would create a gaping hole in revenue for many public services.

"Oregonians will have a clear choice this November: A yes vote will blow a hole in state, local, and mental-health budgets, while corporate grocers make big profits," Ryan Frank, a coalition spokesman, said in a statement Thursday. "A no vote will preserve a system that Oregonians believe works and has allowed Oregon's craft alcohol industry to thrive."

The opponents' argument about revenue is true, but to a degree.

Liquor sales are big money

for Oregon. In the last 2013-15 budget cycle, net sales from Oregon's 200-plus state-run liquor stores topped \$1 billion for the first time, compared with the \$35.3 million brought in by beer and wine taxes, according to the liquor control commission.

Handing things over to the free market means the state either gives up that revenue entirely or it comes up with a way to preserve it through a new tax.

Unlike past efforts, grocers decided this year to leave that tax issue up to the Legislature, which floated an idea last month but ultimately tabled it until next year. If the measure passes in November, lawmakers would have a six-month legislative session to hammer out an alternative before July 2017, when privatization would go into effect.

## LETTERS

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regulations and taxes that drive job-creators offshore and upholding our immigration laws to protect American workers.

Jeff Mackey

♦ ♦ ♦

To the Editor:

Dave Marlow's letter to the editor on March 22, 2016 regarding the minimum-wage bill starts off with "liberal, socialistic democrats infesting the current Oregon legislature," followed by what could have been a review of contrast of both the good and the bad related to minimum-wage increases.

But instead what I read was a political preface followed by blah-blah-blah that we so frequently see from someone reposting opinions that may or may not hold any water at all. And not much in the way of actual evidence to support any of the claims.

My first job paid something like \$2.40 per hour many years ago, consistent with the minimum wage at the time; would that be a better wage to set it at for today's economy?

I'm not going to advocate for either side, but as a small vineyard owner that hires contract labor that are paid a couple bucks over the minimums according to my vineyard manager, I neither resent paying the slight increase that will occur over the next few years, nor do I see the affects that are alluded to in the letter. Ag work in particular is tough work, and these folks (men and women) are getting paid

fairly, but the contractor still cannot find enough qualified people at wage rates above the minimum wage requirement.

Straw man arguments and catch phrases like "job killing" just don't work for me. There are subtle affects that will occur, that I'm sure of, but statements like "removing job opportunities" immediately makes me think this is just a politically driven puff piece rather than any cogent set of arguments against this legislation.

Yes, our legislature includes citizen legislators — if you don't like what they've done, why not try running so you can affect change? But if you do, you might want to change how your publications sound, as at least some of us don't rise to that sort of bait.

Randy McCall


*Salon Renaissance*

**R**

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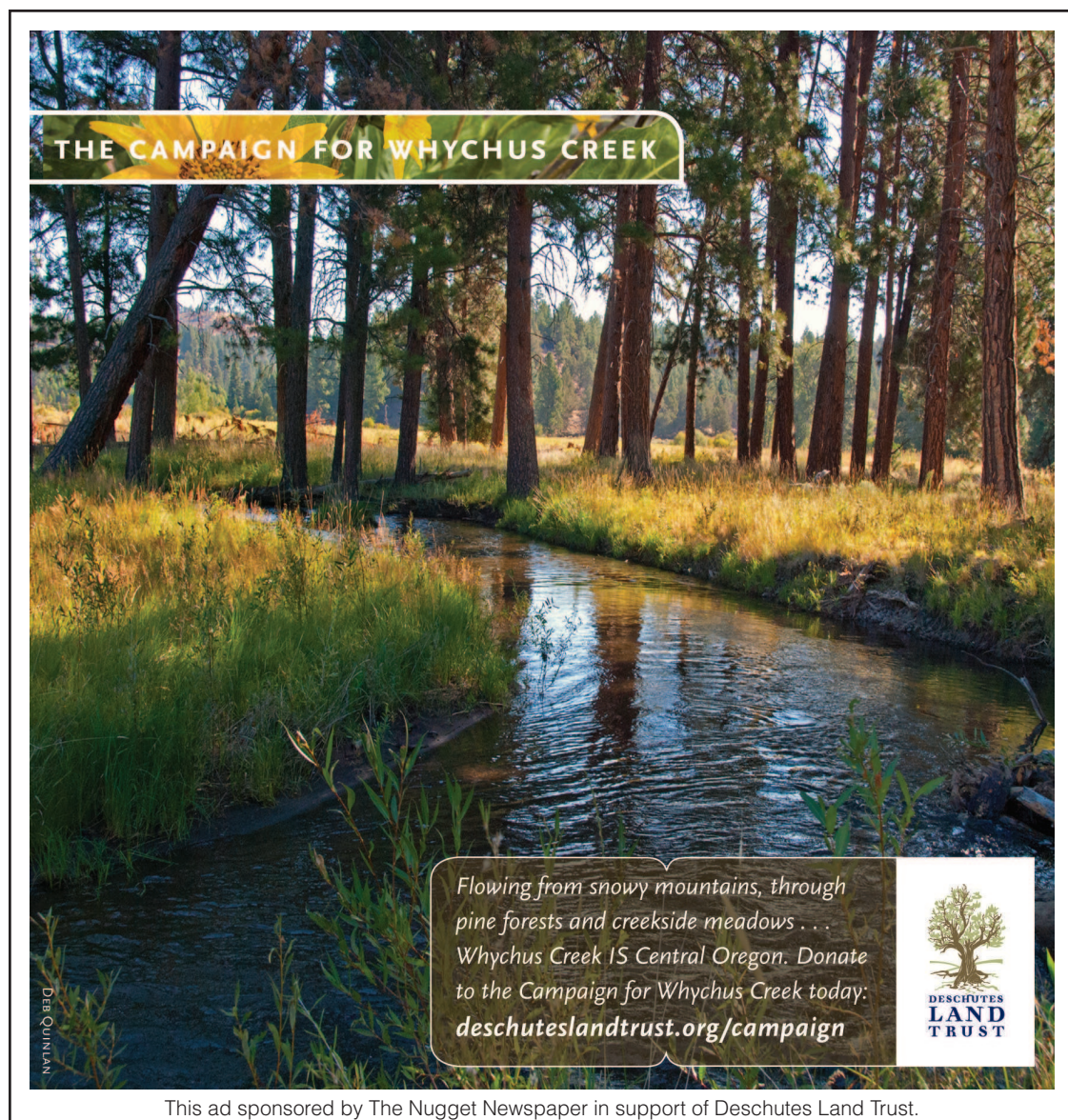
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