

BEER, DEATH AND TAXES

BY ROB WEISS

As they say, there are only two things inevitable in life: death and taxes. Yet most people are pretty conservative when it comes to paying taxes. Sure, it is a necessary evil, like going to the dentist or advertising your business, but most people also understand it is needed to keep our social services up and running whether that be on the state, local or national level.

Most people do not want to pay taxes to the feds for a never-ending misguided war or a missile defense shield. We do not want to pay huge taxes when we decide to reward our hours of hard work with a shiny, new expensive toy. Hell, we do not even want to have a state sales tax or local income tax to help fund our schools.

So imagine the outrage that will follow when you, dear readers, fellow lovers of beer, find out the current tax rate on beer. Did you know that upwards of a frothy 40 percent of the cost of every bottle of beer you buy is for tax purposes? That makes it the single most expensive ingredient in the retail cost. Imagine if your favorite flavor were 40 percent cheaper! And guess whose state has one of the highest taxes on beer in the nation? You guessed it: Our very own Oregon.

The beer taxes hit hard. In 1991, the national beer tax doubled from \$9 per barrel to \$18. This amounted to the largest single increase in tax on beer in our history. This was done along with the luxury taxes to balance the budget. The luxury taxes typically taxed high-end items like cars, yachts, airplanes and jewelry. Less than a year later Congress repealed the luxury tax, but guess what did not get rolled back? Right again: the beer tax.

The high tax rate can be used as an argument for discouraging alcohol abuse, drunk driving and underage drinking. People who abuse alcohol are not going to be affected by price. They will drink if they want/have/need to regardless of an extra buck or two.

Several studies have shown there is consistently no impact from these taxes reducing the level of drunk driving by adults and teen-agers. Drunk driving has decreased since the campaigns by Mothers Against Drunk Driving and SADD (Students Against Drunk Driving) began in the 1980s and the penalties for conviction grew more severe. As for underage drinkers, if they are willing to break the law by drinking, a steep tax probably will not deter them more than the consequences of getting caught.

Now our fair state wants to up the tax again with Gov. Kulongoski allocating 2 percent of the current liquor tax revenues to new alcohol and drug treatment programs. These funds would typically go to the General Fund, yet state and local governments have not been accountable for what they currently collect. Only a small percentage of liquor tax revenue is specifically earmarked for treatment programs. With Oregon's economy in a constant state of struggle, raising taxes not only hurts consumers, it also affects the myriad businesses that are involved in the beer industry.

Oregon is home to roughly 80 craft breweries and generates \$375 million in economic benefits for our state. This industry employs thousands of people, from the growers of hops to the drivers who make the deliveries to the bartenders and retailers who serve us up. An increase in the tax has a trickle-down effect that will certainly have a negative impact on the industry as a whole.

Sure, the politicians and proponents will say it is only 10 cents a serving, which equals \$2.40 extra per case. But this is at the wholesale level. By the time it gets

cold and into our hands, it will be \$3 at a minimum.

So rise up and let your voice be heard. We may not be able to stop the never-ending war after five years and billions and billions of dollars (not to mention the human toll of dead and wounded), but we still may be able to keep our suds at their current levels. Let our state representatives know 40 percent is more than enough on a cold one and raising these taxes further is unjust. Now let's all grab a cold one and make a toast to summer and good beer at a good price. What could be more American than that?

DIETING AND BEER DRINKING

Options for continuing your favorite sport BY JENNIFER DONOHUE

You are on a diet, but you love beer. What is a beer drinker to do? Do you want to lose that beer belly and look good for the ladies with their own beer goggles or just keep drinking those 500-calorie brown ales?

These are very tough decisions that can make your inner beer snob very insecure. One can give up seconds, desserts, carbs, sodas, mochas with whole milk, but beer?! How will you survive?

Well, beer makers have come to the rescue — in a watered-down, kind of diluted way. Diet beers are a hot item right now, with mostly low carbohydrate options available.

Considering that beer is very close to the make up of bread, carbohydrate reduction is one of the ways to reduce the caloric affects of beer on a diet. This is done by adjusting the grain mixes by adding corn and rice. Changing yeast types and mashing temps also helps. The fermentation times are also made longer to convert as many of the carbs to alcohol as possible.

Obvious to a beer drinker is the other way to cut calories in beer: reducing the alcohol level. A low carb and low alcohol beer has about 7 percent alcohol. According to the federal government, this can be called a "low-carb" beer on the label.

Since alcohol spurs the liver into making undesirable fats called triglycerides, low-alcohol beer can help the dietary effects of beer on the girth. It is just not as flavorful, but it is an option.

There are the macro brew products like Miller Ultra and Light, Latrobe Rock Green Light, and the microbrew type of light beers like Coastal Light Pale Ale with only 5.4 carbs. This can be found at Trader Joe's. My high-carb, high-alcohol research may be full of holes: Does anyone out there know of any local low carb beers?

Unfortunately, moderation is the key to all diets — or not drinking at all. But that is so boring.



RAISE A GLASS

Although Eugene may be viewed by many people across the nation as a tiny town filled with anarchists, hippies, running trails and mediocre college sports teams, the beer community has made a big name for itself.

Because of great local breweries like McMenamins, Steelhead, Eugene City Brewery (Rogue) and new kids on the block Ninkasi and Willamette Brewery, Eugene is getting the national recognition it deserves.

The June issue of Boston's *BeerAdvocate* magazine named Eugene #5 in its list of "Nine Great Beer Towns You Didn't Know Were Great Beer Towns."

Cheers, Eugene! Keep the beer flowing.

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