

Brouhaha in the Legislature Over Beer Tax

BY JAKE THOMAS
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Mentioning the word "Oregon" conjures up images of pristine beaches, organic veggies, bike lanes, and high-quality beer.

This last item has been sparingly taxed for decades. But with state revenue in a slump, legislators are putting this industry in its sight as a new source of funding for addictions treatment—a chronically under-funded service. But the beer industry isn't giving up without a fight.

House Bill 2461 would slap a \$49.61 tax on each 31 gallon barrel, up from \$2.60. The tax applies to Oregon-made as well as national brand beers. Money raised from it would be earmarked for alcohol treatment services and prevention.

The tax hasn't been raised in nearly 32 years, and has remained as one of the lowest in the county.

It's not clear how much consumers will have to pay if it passes. Fifteen cents to a couple of bucks per glass are numbers that have been thrown

around as possible amounts.

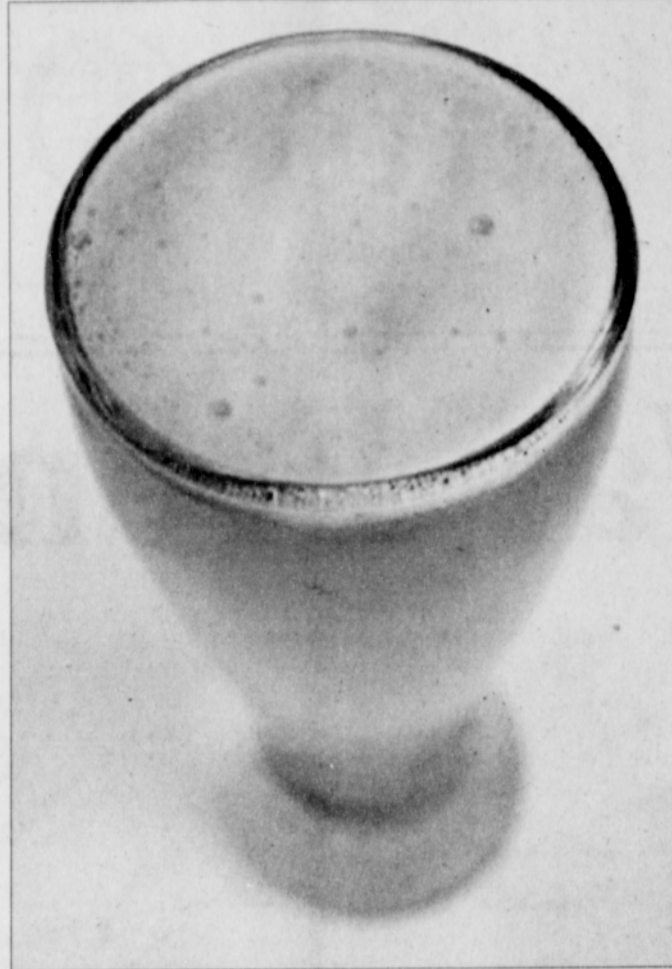
Advocates for the tax say that it will fund Oregon's horrendously ignored addiction treatment services.

"I think this bill is a very good idea," said Gina Nikkel, the executive director of the Association of Oregon Community Mental Health Programs. She explained that society as a whole has to pay for the addictions of others. Children from broken homes have to go into foster care, and addicts that don't receive treatment end up in prison. It makes more sense, according to Nikkel, to pay for treatment early on.

A report from the Oregon Department of Human Services suggests that the state loses billions of dollars each year in productivity and spending on health care costs due to untreated substance problems. The report recommends that millions more be spent on treatment and prevention.

However, the bill is not without its critics.

"It's a bad road to go down,"



Oregon lawmakers are considering the first increase in the beer tax in three decades to pay for addiction treatment programs.

said Steve Buckstein, a senior policy analyst at the free-market-oriented Cascade Policy Institute. He argued that any tax increase should be broad so that the state doesn't become too dependant on it. He is also critical of how supporters of the tax claim that they are targeting the beer industry, but, in fact, consumers are the ones that will bear the burden.

Pointed opposition has come, unsurprisingly, from the beer industry.

According to information from the Oregon Government Ethics Commission the Oregon Beer and Wine Distributors Association shelled out \$75,600 last year alone to retain a lobbying firm, the Romain Group, to maintain its clout in the legislature. The firm, headed by Paul Romain, is known for being aggressive and effective.

Romain argues that taxing beer producers is a bad idea because middlemen will raise the price significantly before it reaches the consumer.

"It could be devastating," said Paul Gatzka, the director of the Brewer's association.

However, Chuck Sheketoff, the executive director of the Oregon Center for Public Policy, said it's about time for a beer tax increase. He argued that the idea that middle men will drive up the price of micro-brews up so high that they'll be drinking more humble brews is "just bizarre." He points to increases in the gas tax as an example, saying that the middle men haven't added additional costs. He also argued that if the beers are that good, people will pay a bit more for them.

A recently issued poll by Moore Information, Inc. states that 61 percent of Oregonians would support paying 15 cents more for a glass of beer.

When asked about the influence of the beer lobby, Sheketoff points to the fact that the beer tax hasn't risen in 32 years as proof of the lobby's success.

The bill is currently in the house Revenue Committee and is not scheduled to come up before the House considers other revenue boosters, like increasing the corporate minimum tax.

Mixed Results for Charter School Success

Portland Public Schools approved its first charter school in 1999. Almost 10 years later, a performance audit finds that Portland's seven charter schools have a mixed track record in improving student achievement and education in-

novation, but highly satisfied parents, staff and students.

The school district audit reviewed student assessment results, financial data, enrollment records and other information.

In 2000-01, PPS had only 66 charter school students, attend-

ing the McCoy Academy (since closed). Today, 1,080 students attend one of seven PPS charter schools: Arthur Academy, Emerson, LEP High, Opal, Portland Village, SEI Academy and Trillium public charter schools.

Auditor Richard Tracy found

that charter schools attracted students who were, on average, far less likely to be low-income and minority learners than the PPS average.

While some charter schools posted impressive academic results (measured by state stan-

dardized assessments), others lagged behind comparable schools statewide. Most charter school students showed smaller gains in reading and math achievement than PPS students in the same grades.

However, Tracy noted, "stu-

dent achievement is difficult to fully assess due to lack of specific, measurable charter contract goals and insufficient annual reporting." He also concluded that a "lack of timely financial reports inhibits assessment of charter school financial stability."

Soul Train Host gets Probation

(AP) -- Don Cornelius has been sentenced to three years' probation after pleading no contest to misdemeanor spousal battery.

Court records show Cornelius' attorney entered the plea March 18 on behalf of the creator and host of the television show "Soul Train" on Wednesday.

Cornelius was charged in November with spousal battery, assault with a deadly weapon



Don Cornelius

The 72-year-old was arrested a month earlier after police were called to his Hollywood Hills home following a report of domestic dispute.

Records indicate the other charges were dismissed as part of Cornelius' plea agreement. He was ordered not to use threats or force against anyone, including his wife Victoria, and must attend a yearlong domestic violence course.

and dissuading a witness from making a police report, all misdemeanors.

Spring Break Patrols Added

Portland Police have begun a citywide enhanced patrol mission during Spring Break.

This mission, which will run through Sunday, March 29, is designed to provide a positive and safe environment for juveniles and improve neighborhood livability by minimizing juvenile-related crime.

The Police Bureau's five precincts, school resource officers, traffic division, and transit police division are par-

ticipating in curfew missions, transit area enhanced patrol missions and traffic missions.

Officers will concentrate on areas in the city where juveniles consistently congregate in large groups or where there have been ongoing problems with speed racing, vandalism, and property crime.

Every year, the Portland Police Bureau partners with the Office of Neighborhood Involvement, Portland's Parks and

Recreation, Oregon Youth Authority, Youth Gang Outreach, Police Activities League, the Boys and Girls Clubs and other community partners, to offer safe alternatives for youth during Spring Break.

A list of some of the offering, compiled by the Office of Youth Violence Prevention, is on the city's webpage at portlandonline.com.

Discount Computer Classes at Mt. Hood

If you need to upgrade your computer skills or you learn better with a friend, the Mt. Hood Community College Community Skills Center has a deal for you. During spring term, the center is offering two classes for the price

of one. Enroll and pay for "Word 2007, Level I," and then take "Word 2007, Level II" for free; or pay for "Introduction to the Internet and e-mailing," and bring a friend along for free.

Located at MHCC's Maywood

Park Campus, 10100 N.E. Prescott St., the skills center offers a number of credit-free self-paced classes. Register and begin the course anytime throughout the year. Knowledgeable instructors are available in the computer lab to answer any questions.

To take advantage of this offer, the free class must be of equal

or lesser value than the purchased class; enrollment for both classes is required at time of registration; and registration must be in person/

For more information, call 503-491-6100. For a complete list of classes offered at the Community Skills Center visit www.mhcc.edu/commskills.

PSU Hires Assistant

Brandon Shelby has been named the new secondary coach for the Portland State football program.

Shelby joins PSU after being the defensive backs coach at the University of San Diego in 2008 where the Toreros went 9-2. He will take over as coach of the Viking cornerbacks and safeties and begin working with them during spring football.

Shelby is a 2004 graduate of the University of Oklahoma with a degree in Business Management. He also earned a Masters degree in Human Relations from Oklahoma in 2005.

Shelby spent the 2006 season as a defensive assistant at Oklahoma. In

2007 he served as a graduate assistant at the University of Arizona.



Brandon Shelby

A defensive back for the Sooners, Shelby was a four-year letterman from 2001-04. He was a two-time Academic All-Big 12 selection and also earned Associated Press All-Big 12 honors.

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