

March 2008

IOWA'S BOTTLE BILL TURNING 30

Shall We Celebrate It — and Improve It?

In 1978, Iowa passed a law requiring a fully refundable nickel deposit on all alcoholic and carbonated beverage containers. Our “Bottle Bill” faces a new world, with the same tools it had 30 years ago.

OLD ENOUGH FOR A BIGGER ALLOWANCE

Since 1978 the value of \$1 has increased to \$3.18. Had it kept pace with inflation the 5-cent beverage container deposit would now be 16 cents.¹

IT NEEDS SOME JUICE ... AND WATER, SPORTS DRINKS, TEAS, ETC.

When Iowa passed the Bottle Bill, many non-carbonated, non-alcoholic beverages now marketed were virtually non-existent or not sold in the containers now used. In 2002, non-carbonated, non-alcoholic beverages accounted for 21 percent of the total beverage market share. By 2005 they had grown to 27 percent. By 2010, sales of flavored, noncarbonated drinks are expected to surpass soda sales.²

A PROVEN TOOL IN DEALING WITH CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is a critical challenge for this generation. Addressing this challenge is tougher when beverage containers are tossed. In the United States, 139 billion beverage containers are thrown away rather than recycled. An enormous amount of energy is used to manufacture new containers. The amount of energy expended in the production of replacement containers is enough to meet the annual energy needs of 3.3 million households.³ This is 2.75 times the energy used by Iowa households.⁴ Our Bottle Bill is already helping to reduce Iowa's greenhouse gas emissions, but it could do more if the deposit were increased to encourage more recycling and if it were expanded to all beverage containers.

IOWA'S BOTTLE BILL MET ITS GOALS, BUT NEEDS UPDATING

After Iowa passed its Bottle Bill, beverage container litter decreased by 77 percent and overall litter decreased by 38 percent.⁵ The Bottle Bill spurred recycling among Iowans, leading to the development of a waste recycling industry, which has reduced the volume of waste sent to our landfills. Since 1988 it is estimated the amount of garbage sent to landfills per capita has decreased by 33 percent.⁶

Iowans increased their recycling with the birth of the Bottle Bill and haven't stopped, contrary to national trends. In 1992, 53 percent of beverage containers were recycled nationwide, but recycling has decreased over the last decade and a half; in 2006 only 33 percent of containers were recycled. In the 11 states with bottle bills, however, recycling rates range between 65 and 95 percent. Michigan, the only state with a 10-cent deposit, recycles 95 percent of its beverage containers.⁷ Iowans recycle 91 percent of the beverage containers included in our law.⁸

A '30TH BIRTHDAY PRESENT' FOR ALL IOWANS

Nearly 91 percent of Iowans support the current bottle law. Expanding coverage to all beverage containers would give a birthday present to the nearly 76 percent who have supported expansion.⁹

¹ Based on the Consumer Price Index available at www.bls.gov/cpi.

² Gitlitz, Jennifer and Pat Franklin. February 2007. *Water, Water Everywhere: The growth of non-carbonated beverages in the United States*. The Container Recycling Institute.

³ Gitlitz, Jennifer and Pat Franklin. February 2007. *Water, Water Everywhere: The growth of non-carbonated beverages in the United States*. The Container Recycling Institute.

⁴ There were 1.2 million households in Iowa in 2006.

⁵ Iowa Department of Transportation, Highway Division. April 1980. *Litter Survey*.

⁶ Iowa Legislative Fiscal Bureau. December 1999. *Overview of the Beverage Container Control Act*.

⁷ Gitlitz, Jennifer and Pat Franklin. February 2007. *Water, Water Everywhere: The growth of non-carbonated beverages in the United States*. The Container Recycling Institute.

⁸ Legislative Services Agency, Fiscal Services Division. January 2008. *Agriculture and Natural Resources Appropriations Subcommittee Detailed Analysis of the FY 2009 Governor's Recommendations*.

⁹ Lutz, Gene. 2003. *Public Survey Concerning Recycling Beverage Containers*. University of Northern Iowa Center for Social and Behavioral Research.

The Iowa Policy Project

Founded in 2001, The Iowa Policy Project is a non-profit, non-partisan research organization based in Mount Vernon, with its principal office in Iowa City. IPP reports cover a wide range of topics of concern to the citizens of Iowa. These reports are made available to the public on the web at www.iowapolicyproject.org. Some also are offered at the website of the Iowa Fiscal Partnership, www.iowafiscal.org.

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