

DAILY

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MAY-31-00

EDITORIALS

Liquor lobby wins La. lawmakers

■ OUR STAND: Legislators should have taxed liquor industry.

State lawmakers ought to be ashamed. They are in the process of raising personal income taxes to close the budget deficit. There are plans to raise riverboat gaming taxes to 3 percent. A myriad of other tax generators are being looked at. Yet, thanks to the powerful liquor lobby, a proposal to increase taxes on booze didn't even make it out of committee.

Voters must sometimes wonder whether their lawmakers are drunkenly meting out public policy.

Citizens ought to hold accountable their elected officials who can't see the long-term benefits of asking the liquor industry to do its part. Apparently, legislators are more concerned about holding down the cost of a six-pack than funding education and health care. Because of the more than \$300 million budget deficit, Medicaid payments to providers has been slashed, threatening to run many providers out of business, and it appears teachers and college professors won't likely get the pay raises they've been promised. Not during this legislative session, anyway.

Meantime, count on the price of a cheap high to remain just that.

Just before the special session, Sen. David Cain, D-Dry Creek, distributed to legislators a list of the taxes on alcoholic beverages and the year of the last increase.

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Amazingly, the tax on beer has not been increased since 1948, more than a half a century. The current state tax on beer is \$10 per 81 gallons. The last tax increase on liquor was in 1970. The current state tax on liquor is 66 cents per liter. The last tax increase on wines was in 1956. Depending on the type, wines are taxed from 6 cents to 42 cents per liter. Cain wanted to raise the tax on all wines by 56 cents per liter, and the increases would have ranged from 133 percent to 1,867 percent.

Lawmakers should have considered some form of a tax increase on booze. As much as Louisianans like to party with alcohol, even the most meager increase would have substantially helped reduce the deficit. Instead, at least one message that lawmakers sent is this: Cheap beer and wine ranks higher than health care for the poor and decent wages for the state's educators.

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