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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
FROM OREGON PARTNERSHIP

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OREGON PARTNERSHIP SAYS BEER AND WINE INDUSTRY LOBBYING EFFORTS HURTING FIGHT TO PREVENT UNDERAGE DRINKING

Legislators' trips to Hawaii and campaign contributions from Oregon Beer and Wine Distributors Association "part of a bigger problem."

(Portland, OR) Oregon Partnership, a state-wide non-profit organization committed to providing drug prevention education and treatment referral, has come down hard on lobbying tactics by members of the Oregon Beer and Wine Distributors Association.

"This peddling of influence has a profound effect on dealing with one of our top public health issues – underage drinking," says Judy Cushing, Oregon Partnership Executive Director. "One of the beer industry's top priorities in Oregon is to prevent the raising of the beer tax, which hasn't been raised in nearly 30 years in the state, and is one of the very lowest in the nation. We are at the bottom of the barrel on this issue, and it's because of the powerful lobbying by the industry."

Research shows that higher beer taxes lead to reductions in the levels and frequency of drinking and binge drinking among youth. That's because teenagers and young adults are more price sensitive.

"Legislation to increase the tax on major brands - but would exempt local brewers - didn't even get out of committee during the last session," says Cushing. "The lobbying tactics have paid off for the big out-of-state brewers, and now we're seeing why."

Recent Oregonian stories have detailed all-expense-paid trips by several state legislators to Hawaii courtesy of beer and wine distributors.

Proceeds from an increase in the beer tax would support alcohol prevention, treatment, recovery, and enforcement. The early onset of alcohol is inextricably connected to later drug abuse and dependence.

Some 17 percent of the alcoholic beverages sold in Oregon are consumed by underage drinkers. States that have higher taxes on beer were found to have lower death rates among young people involved in alcohol-related accidents.

About Oregon Partnership:

Oregon Partnership is a statewide nonprofit that has worked to promote healthy kids and communities for well over a decade by raising awareness about drug and alcohol issues, providing prevention education in classrooms, and 24-hour crisis lines for people needing help. To learn more, visit www.orpartnership.org.

