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SUPPORT FOR OREGON BEER TAX INCREASE GAINING MOMENTUM

Oregon Partnership: “It’s time for major beer companies to pay their fair share”

(Portland, Oregon) Coming on the heels of positive poll numbers and an endorsement by the Oregon Liquor Control Commission, a proposal to raise the Oregon beer tax for the first time in 32 years is attracting more support.

Such groups as Local 503 of the Service Employees International Union, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, the Oregon Prevention Education Recovery Association, and the Governor’s Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse have thrown their support behind House Bill 2461.

Oregon’s beer tax – less than a penny a glass – is effectively the lowest in the country. The bill would raise the tax by 15 cents with revenues going directly toward the prevention and treatment of alcohol and drug abuse.

“It’s about time the national and international companies that sell their beer in Oregon need to pay their fair share of the \$3 billion a year for alcohol-related crime, violence, lost productivity and health costs,” says Pete Schulberg, Communications Director of Oregon Partnership. “Guess who’s been paying for it up to now? Oregon Taxpayers, that’s who.”

More than 90 percent of the \$165 million per year raised by the 15-cent increase would come from out-of-state producers.

Substance abuse prevention and treatment programs in Oregon are facing funding cuts of 83 percent. Meanwhile, the need is increasing: The state’s alcohol and drug crisis lines and the suicide prevention line – operated by Oregon Partnership - are receiving more than double the normal amount of calls from those seeking help.

A March, 2009 survey of Oregon voters conducted by Moore Information, Inc showed that 61 percent favor the 15-cent increase.

Key findings of the survey reveal:

- **61 percent of Oregonians favor increasing the beer and wine tax** by fifteen cents a glass in order to ensure adequate funding for substance abuse treatment and prevention programs. This tax is **supported in all regions** of the state **among Republicans, Democrats and Independents alike.**

- Given a choice between cutting funding of substance abuse treatment and prevention programs or increasing taxes to ensure these programs are adequately funded, **increasing the beer and wine tax is preferred by a margin of 64 percent to 29 percent.**

- **80 percent of voters statewide are concerned about substance abuse**, with voters outside the Portland Metro area most concerned.

- **64 percent expect substance abuse problems to increase** as a result of the recession.

While the poll referred to a “beer and wine tax,” House Bill 2461 in the Oregon Legislature only applies to beer.

Last week, the OLCC unanimously endorsed a resolution asking the Oregon Legislature to raise the beer tax.

Commissioner Bob Rice said singling out hard liquor to carry the financial burden as a result of alcohol abuse was “indefensible.”