

The Gloucester Daily Times

Bottle bill quickly gaining support

By Claude Marx and Colin Steele, Staff writers

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BOSTON - The bottle battle could be resolved this year.

With renewed support from Gov. Mitt Romney, backers of a bill to expand the types of bottles that would be included in recycling programs are hoping that they can get the bill passed.

The measure would add water, sports drinks, teas, juices, wine and liquor cans and bottles to the list of bottles that require a deposit when purchased. The deposit for non-alcoholic beverages would remain at 5 cents while the deposit for alcoholic products would be 15 cents.

"If it doesn't happen this year, it's not going to happen for a while," said Rep. Douglas W. Petersen, D-Marblehead, the measure's main sponsor. "There is no better way to capture more bottles and alleviate some of the bottles that are littered on roadsides."

Since the state's original recycling bill was passed in 1983, approximately 16 billion bottles and cans have been returned and recycled, according to data compiled by the Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group, a Boston-based advocacy organization that strongly backs the bill. The organization estimates that about 90,000 tons of beverage containers are disposed as garbage, rather than recycled.

The major opposition to the measure has been from some in the beverage industry. The Grocery Manufacturers of America, a Washington trade association, which in the past has taken a leading role in trying to defeat the bill, did not return phone calls seeking comment. But when a similar measure was being considered by the Legislature in 2003, the group's director of state relations said it was a "costly and inefficient means of recycling" and jeopardizes progress made by curbside recycling programs."

The bottle bill as it exists now costs consumers money, and expanding it to include more

products will only make the problem worse, said Wayne Campbell, owner of the Liquor Locker on Main Street.

"It would be detrimental," he said. "The bottle bill's a failure in my eyes."

Campbell has heard some industry estimates that bottle bill-related surcharges from wholesalers and distributors cost customers \$2.50 for every case of soda or beer they buy.

"If they put it on everything, who's going to pay?" he asked. "The customer's going to pay."

Campbell said the city's curbside program is a more effective way of promoting recycling than an expanded bottle bill.

The director of that program, Sue Mitchell, said the bill would encourage more people to recycle and cut down on litter in the city. Water bottles and small bottles of liquor make up a large amount of the trash picked up from city streets, she said.

Placing a 15 cent deposit on alcohol containers will also have an indirect benefit for the city, Mitchell said. Money collected under the bottle bill goes back to communities and helps pay for other recycling efforts. Gloucester has received more than \$100,000 over the years, which it has used to by recycling and composting bins and to expand its curbside recycling program.

"We've been rewarded with a lot of that money," she said.

The average curbside recycling rate in Massachusetts is 34 percent, according to the Department of Environmental Protection.

Unclaimed deposits on bottles generate approximately \$35 million annually for the state and Petersen estimates that the changes could add another \$10 million to the state's coffers. But the lawmaker called that a "double edged

sword" since the state only makes money when people don't return beverage containers, and therefore generate more waste.

Theodore C. Speliotis, D-Danvers. Sen. Andrea F. Nuciforo, Jr., D-Pittsfield. is the main sponsor in that chamber.

Romney endorsed the measure in the budget proposal he submitted to the Legislature last week. He did not highlight his support in either his news conference unveiling the spending plan or in his letter to the lawmakers about the budget.

Petersen said the large number supporters in the Legislature, coupled with changes in the composition of the key committees scheduled to be announced this week, gives him reason for hope.

The bill has 25 cosponsors, the most in the 10 years it has been introduced, including Rep.
