

Whole Concept of Sin Taxes Wrong

MY NEIGHBOR, Dick Wray, dropped by to complain about the decreasing number of restaurants that don't sell liquor-by-the-drink illegally.

There still are a few, but saloon operators seem to have a pretty clear understanding that officials sworn to uphold laws against this practice will disregard their oaths.

"Since they won't enforce the law, maybe the state ought to start collecting taxes on the setups and liquor served," Wray said. "If we can't eliminate the sin, we ought at least to tax it."

What really ought to be done is to cut off the salaries of officers who are guilty of gross neglect of duty. That would save a lot of tax dollars paid to police, sheriffs, prosecutors and judges.

Obviously, this will not be done. Since virtually all officials appear to be guilty to a degree, who would be available to take after the others?

The situation is serious because it reflects a trend for officials to choose which laws they will enforce

and which they will ignore. The liquor situation is only one of many.

Jack Altman telephoned a few days ago with a somewhat similar complaint about lack of enforcement of state laws regulating bingo games in Oklahoma County. This was after a Cleveland County judge had closed down an illegal bingo establishment in Norman.

No doubt bingo games are operated in certain places in accordance with laws limiting frequency, number of games and amount of prizes. However, officials would have to be blind, illiterate or isolated not to observe that others are not. Only non-profit organizations may be licensed.

Lawmakers are aware that raising taxes does not generate enthusiastic voter support, so they impose what are called "sin taxes" on habits widely regarded as vices. The theory is that if people want to indulge in these "sins," let 'em pay for the privilege.

Liquor and beer taxes have become such a significant part of government finance that if people

stopped "drinking and driving" deficit financing would take on new meaning. We license drunken driving!

The government requires manufacturers to stamp each package of cigarettes with a warning that smoking is hazardous to health. That didn't keep Congress from doubling the tax to 16 cents per pack this year. The objective was not to discourage smoking, but to bring in more revenue.

The whole concept of "sin taxes" is in error, because the practice puts a stamp of approval on objectionable practices and they make every citizen a participant in the businesses and a beneficiary of revenue derived from their operation.

If the theory of supporting government by "sin taxes" were sound, where would we stop? Should we license people to steal, practice prostitution, or even commit murder?

When government becomes dependent upon revenue from evil practices it is no different from individuals running the same games.