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CRV -- Bottles and Bucks

Back three decades ago the California Legislature passed the California Beverage Container Recycling and Litter Reduction Act of 1986 (AB 2020). From time-to-time over the ensuing thirty years, I have quietly and always inwardly cursed that "Bottle Bill" as it's called. And before I let you get ahead of me and this story, it's not exactly the nickel and dime "deposits" that have irked me. What has always been a bummer to me is that I never tossed a soda can or bottle onto the roadside in my whole life -- such an act just never occurred to me. So now we've got to solve the problems caused by the state's bottle-tossing jerks. That "new" legislation, in the name of "litter control," potentially imposed a "tax" on me and created an astounding multi-million-dollar bureaucracy to administer and enforce it.

To prove I'm not kidding about the fact that this whole thing bugs me, I have to admit to you that I "save" every aluminum can, glass, and plastic bottle that imposes a California Redemption Value (CRV) deposit. It's crazy, even stupid, I'll admit, but in our household, we sort and accumulate the containers into bins we have in the garage. At this point you might be asking: why don't you just toss them in to the Waste Management Recycle cart in your garage?? After all, Waste Management WILL recycle them, and they'll never get to the status of litter.

That's only a partial solution for me. It takes care of the litter issue but leaves me paying a CRV "tax," so to speak. So to avoid the "tax," every six months or so we bag our accumulations and take them over to the Albertsons' Recycle Center in the alley behind the store. And why do we do this? Pure and simple, it's not the money -- to me, and my point, CRV just seems like a tax (on me and everyone else). So we avoid it by getting our deposit back. Big-g-g-g deal you might say. No, it's not. Here I'm looking at our last recycle receipt: \$23.39. Not much for the trouble and handling. But honestly, I really feel pretty good about recovering money that is mine.

In the bigger picture, though. This "Bottle Bill" created what I consider to be an administrative and bureaucratic monster. It's the old story: Follow the Money!!! In 2014 the Beverage Container Recycling Program received \$1.2 Billion from CRV deposits. Approximately 80% (they say) was returned in the form of CRV deposit redemption payments. What about the 20% of unredeemed CRV deposits? Well, state law requires that much of the unredeemed CRV be spent on specified recycling-related programs. These programs are intended to help achieve the goals of increased recycling and reduced litter. There are currently ten of these supplemental programs funded (from unredeemed CRV deposits), including the entire program's administration costs. Such programs include, "subsidizing glass and plastic recycling, encouraging supermarket recycling collection sites, and providing grants for market

development and other recycling-related activities." These so-called supplemental *programs* will spend \$279 *Million* on their *programs* in 2015 ~ 16.

Both the income and the outgo produce such staggering numbers. Maybe it's me, but there seems to be a funding disconnect between the "Litter Issue" and the "Funding Solution." To me, politics and tons of money sometimes seem to lose their way!

On the surface, the mission of the California Beverage Container Recycling Program is pretty straightforward. However, some argue that the Program's solvency is threatened. Managing and controlling huge programs and subsidies, dealing with a scale of operations never contemplated, and coping with fraudulent external activities have all contributed to causing surplus funds to dwindle and to cloud the future with uncertainty.

I have to admit, my recent \$23.39 redemption looks like a pretty small factor when stacked up against the State's \$1.25 *Billion* emerging bottle recycling headache.