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LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

February 2010

The forecast predicts snow even though most of us have SPRING FEVER. Let's check the temperature at the STATE HOUSE: When we last updated the posting, the Labor Committee was focusing on LD 1665, a mandate to require all employers provide pay sick leave. There is nothing new to report as the work session to discuss how to proceed has not been scheduled. Delay usually means a "compromise" is in the works. Stay tuned...

With respect to the alcohol tastings issue; there was a full day of hearings and testimony on two bills to support a change to law to accommodate more flexibility. LD 1628 has been reported out with an amendment.

To read the Act to Amend the Laws Governing the Taste Testing of Alcoholic Beverages, visit:

http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/display_ps.asp?id=1628&PID=1456&snum=124

While LD 1691 is still under consideration, the MBWDA supports access to beer and wine by adult consumers and recognizes that tastings provide such an opportunity. To highlight the success of the law, see the article on Ron's Market in our most recent e-newsletter.

With the luck of the Irish, the Revenue Forecasting Committee did announce a revised state fiscal forecast following its meeting on February 23rd. The Portland Press Herald captured the essence of where the state is at with the editorial: "Revenue report gives state a glimmer of light."

To read the editorial, visit:

http://www.pressherald.com/opinion/revenue-report-gives-state-a-glimmer-of-light_2010-02-24.html

The news focused on positive corporate and personal income tax, with hope that the \$51 million in General Fund tax receipts will lessen the burden of balancing the \$5.8 billion, two-year budget. The news was not all good, however, as the sales tax numbers remain below expectations.

Even with projected increased state revenues, the budget hole is somewhere around \$360 million. Lawmakers need to balance competing demands and priorities. The Governor will submit a "change" package to his original budget proposal. This new plan will incorporate the revised state numbers and incorporate additional federal monies from the Department of Health and Human Services. In the final analysis, the budget will still contain cuts in programs and services.

As referenced above, an additional element of concern is that Maine consumer confidence continues to decline. This may reflect the uncertainty of where things are headed, both for our state as well as the nation. On behalf of the MBWDA, we support the Governor in his efforts to balance the budget without new taxes.

Further, it is our hope that the legislature will proceed in a bi-partisan fashion. In the past we have seen budget packages that only one party, the majority, has adopted. These are challenging economic conditions and we hope that everyone will work together for the best budget for Maine.

— Cheryl Timberlake
Executive Vice President