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THROWAWAYS: 5 RETURNABLES: 0
TIME FOR A COMEBACK!

- Colette Michalski -

In November, the Michigan House Consumers and Agriculture Committee will face the return of the Returnable Bottle Bill, House Bill 4296. Last year, the "Bottle Bill," introduced by H. Lynn Jondahl (D-E. Lansing), died in committee, never coming to a vote. However, this year, with growing public support and Rep. Jondahl chairing the Consumers' Committee, the bill's chance for success appears better - if it can survive the opposition of beverage container interests.

Evidence of new support for the bill comes from many quarters. Governor Milliken voiced his support in his January 1975 State of the State Message, calling legislation banning non-returnable bottles and cans "a step that would have favorable benefit for the environment, toward energy conservation and ultimately for the consumer." Many new legislators campaigned with the "Bottle Bill" as part of their platform. The success of Oregon's bill and public hearings in Michigan and Washington D.C. have increased support for non-returnable legislation. In a poll conducted in Michigan by Market Opinion Research last July, a surprising 73.3% said they favored a "law banning the sale of non-returnable bottles and cans." (19.9% opposed, 6.8% gave no answer).

HB 4296, modelled after successful bottle legislation in Oregon, requires a mandatory minimum deposit on all soft drink, beer, wine or liquor containers made of glass, metal, plastic or paper. The minimum deposits are 10¢ for typical brand-name containers and 5¢ for standardized containers which can be re-used by more than one manufacturer. Deposits on containers of the same size and brand as sold by a dealer would have to be refunded in cash by the dealer on or within 100 yards of the place of business. Also, HB 4296 prohibits the use of detachable opening tops - pull tabs - on metal cans.

Why does Michigan need bottle legislation? According to Rep. Jondahl, "the issue is not only a matter of the enormous amount of solid waste and litter generated by

non-returnables but it is also a matter of the energy it takes to manufacture the throwaways, the consumer dollars spent to buy throwaways and the state and local funds it takes to clean up after throwaways."

-Throwaway bottles and cans place an increasing burden on municipal solid waste facilities. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that beverage containers constitute 8.8 million tons or 7% of 132 million tons of yearly solid waste. Beverage containers which increase 8% yearly, are the fastest growing portion of municipal wastes.

-EPA energy studies show that a returnable glass bottle, refilled 15 times, uses 50 to 85 percent less energy than a throwaway of equal size. A switch to returnables in Michigan in 1972 would have saved 4.48 trillion BTU's - an amount equaling the energy needed to heat 26,400 Ann Arbor homes for a year.

-A return to returnables would conserve consumer dollars as well. Bottlers could supply beverages in refillable bottles to retailers for 3¢ to 4¢ less than in throwaways - with consumers saving 2¢ to 3¢ per bottle.

-Each year, Michigan spends \$800,000 for litter pick-up along state roads alone. A study prepared by Research Triangle Institute for the EPA found that beverage containers make up 20% of roadside litter by item count and 62% by visibility count. Oregon has shown a 90% drop in beverage container litter causing former Governor Tom McCall to declare the bottle legislation a "rip-roaring success."

The economic advantages seen by supporters of returnable legislation are strongly refuted by opponents who predict shut-downs of can manufacturing plants and severe unemployment. Supporters of HB 4296 believe that it would only cause readjustments in employment, reductions in container manufacturing jobs and increases in bottling, distribution and retail jobs. According to one study by Dr. Myron H. Ross, professor of economics at Western Michigan University, returnable legislation would create about 5,602 new jobs in bottling, distribution and retail.

Opponents of HB 4296 also challenge the environmental necessity of returnable legislation. To solve solid waste and energy problems they favor large resource recovery facilities and recycling stations over source reduction measures like returnable bottles. But resource recovery facilities are very expensive - costing \$10 to \$20 million per facility. Recycling is also a costly and impractical answer to certain solid waste