

---

---

# Rep. Scott Campbell

## *Hot Air & The Bottle Bill*

Last Thursday was a long slog on the House (Zoom) floor. One of the contentious bills we debated was H.175, aka The Bottle Bill.

Vermont's current bottle bill dates back to 1972. It targeted littering, and placed a 5-cent deposit on beer and soft drinks. Litter bottles were added in 1991, but otherwise the law hasn't changed much since.

As the value of a 5-cent deposit has declined over the years, so has the impact on littering. A nickel in 1972 would be worth more than 30 cents today. I venture to say if the deposit on containers were a quarter instead of a nickel, we would have a lot less litter on the side of the road.

H.175 as introduced would have raised the deposit modestly, from a nickel to a dime. (As passed, the deposit remains at 5 cents; more on that in a minute.) The bill greatly expands the types of containers with a deposit to include wine bottles and all carbonated and noncarbonated drinks, except dairy, plant-based beverages ("milks" derived from nuts, soy, etc.), and nonalcoholic cider. With the proliferation of beverage types since 1972 — juices, iced teas, sports drinks, even water — less than half of beverage containers are covered by the bottle bill today.

Before and during floor debate, complaints about the costs of compliance, the cost to consumers (despite the deposit being fully refundable), the threat to business along state borders, and

the loss of revenue to the current recycling system, were loud and long and in my view exaggerated. In the end, the 5-cent increase to the deposit was dropped; it will remain at a nickel, which is less than a penny in 1972 dollars.

Looking at the trash my wife and I pick up on the side of the road, I just don't buy it that adding more container types without increasing the deposit will reduce litter, as supporters of the bill say. Likewise I don't buy it that the bill will cause mom-and-pop stores to close, beverage distributors to stop selling in Vermont, and the recycling system to collapse, as opponents claim.

I also don't buy it that this is an "undue burden" on consumers. Our throwaway civilization generates more trash than any society in history, and we all participate when we purchase — well, anything and everything. It's unsustainable. We have one and only one landfill left in the State. We need to take more responsibility for the wastes generated by what we consume. We must be willing to find ways to "close the loop" and reuse more of the materials we now discard.

What this bill will do is take a small step in that direction. As a practical matter, it will divert more plastic and glass and aluminum containers to redemption centers and away from the waste stream. Those containers will be cleaner, more valuable, and more likely to be reused to make new containers, than what comes out

See **Campbell**, Page A4

This commentary also appeared on [VTDigger.org](http://VTDigger.org) on April 21 with the title: "An update of Vermont's bottle bill is long overdue."

## Campbell

Continued from Page A4  
of the mixed-material "zero-sort" recycling system.

Who could be opposed to reducing the waste stream and reclaiming more beverage containers? Well, all legislators received long emails from the waste and beverage industries detailing supposed defects in H.175. Many of us also received phone calls from constituents — in my case more than on any other single issue including abortion and guns, which made me suspicious that they were well organized by vested interests.

Now, I believe many opponents of H.175 honestly believe their arguments that it will not be good for Vermont. But I also believe

much opposition is being stoked by business interests and is not in the best interest of Vermont, Vermonters, or long-term environmental stewardship. Starkly, it looks like industry trying to bully little ol' Vermont; it certainly has happened before.

The bill advanced in the House on a roll-call vote of 99-46, fully passed by voice vote late Thursday, and will now go to the Senate. If enacted it would take effect in July 2022. I hope most Vermonters will see past the short-term inconvenience of returning (or donating) more containers for redemption, and embrace dealing with our beverage containers more responsibly and sustainably.

*Rep. Scott Campbell, D-Caledonia 3, serves the town of St. Johnsbury in the Vermont House.*