



Put In Your 2¢ Worth...

About 2¢ a drink yields \$44 million annually to reduce the impact of alcohol problems in Missouri.

Question:

Why do some people insist on calling certain payments “sin taxes,” even when they don’t believe that the behavior being taxed is a sin?

Answer:

It is one of those linguistic oddities, a label which persists long after the words have lost their original meanings or when the person cares little about the original context. Journalists, public officials, and even some economists find it useful as a “category,” when they want to put a “spin” (usually a negative spin) on a proposal.

MISSOURI ALCOHOL IMPACT FACT #44

- A review of documents containing the term “sin tax” shows clearly that the “sin” concept used differs radically from concepts of “sin” used in religious and theological writings. Those who wish to know more about sin in this context may appreciate one of the most frequently cited contemporary books about the subject, Plantinga’s Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin (Eerdmans, 1995).
- The term “sin taxes” tends to be introduced into a discussion when it turns to excise taxes involving more than one type of commodity, behavior or condition which is considered less than desirable by some people. Common types are alcohol, tobacco, gambling, and, more recently, business practices and obesity.
- The tendency is to use the term “excise” when the proposal is favorably reviewed, and “sin” when the proposal is viewed with suspicion or outright opposition. Sometimes an author will alternate between the two in the same paper or article.
- It is common for theoreticians and commentators to discuss alcohol excise taxes as “sin taxes” with little if any knowledge of alcohol policy, alcohol excise tax rates, state-by-state comparisons, or epidemiological evidence. One of the most common errors is reference to “moderate consumption” without defining the term, without reference to frequency, quantity, patterns of consumption and without stating basic assumptions.
- Missouri’s Alcohol Impact Coalition prefers to use the term “charges” found in

For more information call one of the Missouri’s Alcohol Impact Coalition members below:

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