

Deja Vu: Washington State Liquor Control Board 65th Anniversary

The following is the foreword inscription from the Washington State Liquor Act written in January of 1934 by then governor Clarence D. Martin to the newly appointed Washington State Liquor Control Board members. This was his interpretation of the purpose and spirit of the state liquor plan. His inspiring words and lofty ideals makes one reflect on how far we have come and yet how similar things are today. "The importance of the Washington State Liquor Act is in that it is supposed to be conducive to temperance. It is not the purpose of this law to encourage anything other than temperance. Unlike many other businesses, you are not expected to promote sales. Instead of promoting the sale of liquor, you want to discourage the sale and use of liquor. Your function is only to make good liquor available to the people under proper conditions. You will, however, have opposition and obstruction. But this opposition will not come from the general run of the people, who seemingly are disposed to give this system a fair trial. The opposition and obstruction will come from those who want to profit from this law or from the liquor traffic. In other words, no matter how it may look on the surface, investigation will trace the objections to profiteers, bootleggers and racketeers. I mention this because I know what is behind and in the minds of those who would undermine us and destroy the public faith in state control. We must remember that the liquor traffic lends itself to racketeering and corruption. So it is up to us to be on guard and to keep ourselves clean. Let it not be said that any of us lended himself to any questionable act or purpose. Let us take the people into our confidence and the people will sustain and uphold the system of state control. Let us remember, too, that the Washington State Liquor Act is an experiment. This law is not perfect and no one offers it as such. It will be up to you to administer it capably and practically, and undoubtedly, as time goes on, experience itself will dictate some changes as necessary. Not only should you administer the law as you find it, but also you should be watchful for betterments and improvements in accordance with the wishes of the people that the legislature may give from time to time. Finally, gentlemen, your problems are great --- no commission of Washington has been given greater responsibility. You have no pattern to follow. You must chart a new course. It is your duty to sense what the people want, and give it to them in so far as it is permitted under this law. If you give the people that sort of an administration, the people will be satisfied. I feel we are entering on one of the most momentous problems this state has ever undertaken. Success or failure will depend on you and me. We will be held accountable if we fail. We cannot ignore the responsibility, we cannot shirk the responsibility, and I know you are willing to join me in shouldering the responsibility. Yet it is heartening to know that the people trust us and expect us to do a good job. Let us not fail that trust." Even after all these years we still face the same oppositions and still manage to maintain the spirit of governor Martin's original hopes for the liquor board. On March 31st, 1934 the first four stores opened, two in Seattle, one in Spokane and one in Tacoma. By the end of that year 46 stores were open for business showing a net profit of \$922,037.22. In addition to the 46 stores, 105 agencies also opened. By 1960 there were 86 stores and 160 agencies, with a net profit of \$31,427,201.78. At the end of fiscal year 1997 there were 155 stores and 159 agencies, with a net profit of \$173,449,717.92. For the past 65 years the Liquor Control Board has been responsible for the sale and distribution of alcohol beverages. This is accomplished through a controlled distribution system, merchandising, education, enforcement, and licensing. To further assist enforcement efforts, the Alcohol Awareness Program was developed in 1992. The first of its kind, this program has taken great strides in working with communities and organizations to promote awareness of the issues [that] surround alcohol. The Liquor Control Board also enforces the tobacco laws covering retail and wholesale licensing, sales to minors, vending machine sales, sampling, and illegal cigarette sales and possession. The Liquor Control Board is an organization committed to customer service and dedicated to diversity and partnership that encourages active participation from the public, its employees and stakeholders. The Board's mission is to serve the public by preventing misuse of tobacco through education, enforcement, and controlled distribution.

Medical Marijuana

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Supporters of the medicinal marijuana law have said they expect that people who previously used marijuana illegally will give plants to patients free of charge.

But Dunham, who's smoked cigarettes, says she's never used marijuana before and doesn't know anybody who does -- either legally or illegally.

New guidelines may help Dr. Rick Bayer, a physician who was a principal sponsor of the medicinal marijuana act, said he thinks doctors will become more willing to participate when they learn about the guidelines issued by the Oregon Medical Association.

The association published guidelines in late April outlining ways that doctors can help patients participate in the law without running afoul of federal drug regulations. Bayer also expects that it will become easier in the future for patients to obtain marijuana by joining support groups for cancer and pain.

Jim Kronenberg, associate executive director of the OMA, said even doctors who think marijuana might be beneficial will be cautious in recommending its use. While using medicinal marijuana is legal under Oregon law, it's still illegal under federal law. And the federal government, through the Drug Enforcement Administration, regulates doctors' prescription privileges. Doctors can't prescribe it Under the new law, doctors don't prescribe marijuana. They only note on a patient's chart that marijuana might help the symptoms.

Patients like Dunham are left to fend for themselves. And while Paige is sympathetic, she can't help.

"Your heart goes out to them," Paige said. "They've been on every painkiller there is, and none of them work."

Callers who leave their names and addresses on Paige's answering machine will receive an application packet with a copy of the medicinal marijuana act, the Health Division's rules, application forms and the guidelines for filling them out.

Callers are from all walks of life, Paige said. "Some people are still able to work, some are disabled completely. Some are people who thought they'd never get involved with this (marijuana) -- law enforcement and corrections officers and people who have been in the military."

Patients at the Portland Veterans Affairs Medical Center face a special barrier. Because the federal government views marijuana as an illegal drug, doctors there can't approve its use.

Meanwhile, Dunham questions the hurdles put up by the law.

"It's not fair," Dunham said. "I want it for pain. I don't want it for enjoyment like the young people do. Doctors are so fussy about your getting addicted. And so what if I did, at 80 years old?"

Doubling of Prison Population has U.S. on Track to be Leading Jailer

WASHINGTON (AP)-- The number of American adults imprisoned has more than doubled over the past 12 years, reaching its highest level ever last year, the Justice Department said Sunday. The United States soon may surpass Russia as the country with the highest rate of incarceration.

At mid-1998, jails and prisons held an estimated 1.8 million people, according to a Bureau of Justice Statistics report. At the end of 1985, the figure was 744,208.

Viewed another way, there were 668 inmates for every 100,000 U.S. residents as of June 1998, compared with 313 inmates per 100,000 people in 1985.

In Russia, 685 people out of every 100,000 are behind bars, according to The Sentencing Project, a U.S. group critical of the general trend toward tougher sentencing of American criminals.

A planned amnesty of 100,000 prisoners in Russia and the expectation of continued increases in the U.S. inmate population means the United States probably will become the world's leading jailer "in a year or two," said Jenni Gainsborough, a Sentencing Project spokeswoman.

The number of people imprisoned in the United States has grown for more than a quarter-century, helped by increased drug prosecutions and a general get-tough policy on all classes of offenders. More criminals serving longer sentences led the inmate population to top 1 million in 1990; it has continued to rise.

About two-thirds of the nation's inmates are in state and federal prisons; the remaining one-third are in local jails. Prisons generally hold convicted criminals sentenced to terms longer than 1 year, while jails typically keep those awaiting trial and those sentenced to 12 months or less.

In the June 1998 Justice Department survey, 1.2 million people were held in prisons, while local jails held about 600,000 men and women. Local jails also supervised more than 72,000 people under various outside work, treatment or home detention programs.

The survey showed the total number of people behind bars grew by 4.4 percent from June 1997.

Between the end of 1990 and mid-1998, the incarcerated population grew an average 6.2 percent annually, said the report's author, statistician Darrel Gilliard.

Although the total growth rate was slower last year, Gilliard said the difference is not statistically significant.

"The numbers have been pretty steady throughout the 1990's, with a pretty steady increase every year," he said.

Gilliard's report showed the number of inmates in state prisons grew 4.1 percent last year; the number in federal prisons grew 8.3 percent; and the number in local jails grew 4.5 percent.

The figures closely track numbers released last summer that showed a 5.2 percent growth rate in federal and state prison inmates by the end of 1997.

THE STRAIGHT DOPE

Science News: May 22, 1999

Long-term marijuana use does not seem to adversely affect mental function, according to a study of 1,318 Baltimore residents. Twelve years after they were first given a standard test of mental ability, volunteers' average scores had declined only slightly. Those who admitted to having smoked marijuana, even heavily, were no more likely to show signs of impaired mental function than people who had never tried the drug, researchers report in the May 1 "American Journal of Epidemiology".

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