

# Why it's important to you and our region to vote for Issue 7 on May 6

By: Dave Wondolowski,  
Executive Secretary, CBCTC

I urge all Cuyahoga County voters to support the May 6 renewal of the small, but beneficial tax on alcohol and tobacco.

Any fair review of this small tax proposal offers up a multitude of facts that make a compelling case for extending it. The tax is good for our working men and women in the labor trades and, in fact, it is good for all of Cuyahoga County and Northeast Ohio.

This is not a tax increase. It merely extends the existing tax that costs about 1.5 cents per beer, a penny for a glass of wine and 4.5 cents per pack of cigarettes.

Initially, the tax generated the funds that were used to pay for the construction of what is now Progressive Field, Quicken Loans Arena and FirstEnergy Stadium. Going forward, if Cuyahoga County voters approve the renewal, it would be used to pay for large-scale capital improvements and repairs at those facilities.

These buildings are no longer new – Progressive Field and Quicken Loans Arena are 20 years old. They have been well-maintained, but major improvements loom. At Quicken Loans Arena, for example, a new roof – estimated to cost about \$6 million – is needed. At Progressive Field, 230,000 square feet of concrete in the concourses and beyond need to be patched and sealed – a job estimated to cost about \$3.5 million.

There are many more projects like that. These buildings are publicly owned, and the leases require that major repairs and improvements are to be paid by the public. The teams, even though they don't own the buildings, have spent more than \$350 million on maintenance, operations and minor repairs.

None of the money from the tax would go to team owners. Every penny would go into the buildings, to improve them and make them last longer.

It is commonplace across the country for communities to contribute public funds toward the construction and/or upkeep of major league sports venues. In Cleveland, I'm told that our leases are "public friendly" compared to other cities. A tiny tax on alcohol and tobacco is much less onerous than other types of taxes.

By extending this tax, we would provide the revenue stream that would pay for the major improvements, which would result in keeping these buildings in major league condition and thereby extending their use for many years to come. It's just like your home – you have to put money into your house in order to keep it maintained.

If these huge buildings aren't cared for now, the costs for neglected improvements will only escalate.

The repairs and improvements will also mean jobs for our colleagues in the trades. Our men and women built these structures, and we will be the ones who are called upon to keep them functioning.

Using union labor means the repairs will be done right. If the tax is not renewed, it will fall upon the City of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County to come up with the money for the repairs.

(And besides, if this tax is not renewed, does anyone really think the price of a beer at your favorite tavern is going to go down by a penny or two? You and I know the answer to that is no.)

This tax – sometimes called the "sin tax" – provided the money to build the arena that brought the Cavaliers back to Cuyahoga County. It built the ballpark that helped keep the Indians in Cleveland. And it built the stadium that helped bring the Browns back.

These buildings hold games and other events that bring 4 million people a year to Cleveland. This means jobs for people in the adjacent

restaurants, hotels and bars that serve sports fans.

The ballpark and the arena have clearly revitalized downtown Cleveland. Does anyone remember the Central Market area before Progressive Field and Quicken Loans Arena were built? It was desolate and empty.

These buildings triggered the ongoing, multi-billion dollar revitalization of downtown Cleveland. Today, there are many large-scale construction projects taking place downtown. This means even more jobs.

The tax on alcohol and tobacco in Cuyahoga County generates about \$13 million a year. The tax is paid by anybody – regardless of where they live – who buys alcohol or tobacco in Cuyahoga County.

And it's not a tax increase.

I'm voting for it. For all of the reasons stated above and more, I ask that you join me in supporting this good issue.