

# Wilmington Star

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## **Raise revenue and save lives**

One way for North Carolina legislators to avoid more cruel and self-defeating cuts in programs that help the disabled and the mentally ill is to raise the taxes on beer, wine and liquor.

Few drinkers would notice the increases being suggested. That includes the proposal to double the five-cents-a-can tax on beer. It's been five cents since 1969, when a nickel was worth about three times as much as it is today.

But some of the same Honorables who are contemplating higher taxes on drinkin' are studiously ignoring higher taxes on smokin'.

The booze-tax proposals would raise \$100 million or so. Raising the nickel-a-pack cigarette tax to 41 cents - still well below the soaring national average - would generate more than twice that much.

The extra \$100 million could go for mental health, or for a host of other needs. Schools and colleges come to mind. So do state buildings, which are quietly disintegrating because the legislature has slashed maintenance budgets in recent years.

But legislators prefer taxing booze because so many of us are Baptists or Methodists who, it goes without saying, never allow alcohol to pass our lips- in many cases because those lips are gripping cigarettes, and though it is possible to imbibe and inhale at the same time, it is a skill that not everyone can master.

True, politicians in this state could never call a levy on cigarettes a "sin tax." OK, call it a "death tax." That would be more accurate.

But whatever we call it, let's raise it.