

Our Wine Might Get Us A Lot More Buzzed Soon, Thanks To Congress

But some public health advocates are none too pleased

By [Ed Cara](#) May 12, 2017

Your next glass of wine might soon be boozier than you expect, thanks to an oddly — for our political times — bipartisan bill currently mulling discussion in Congress.

As initially reported by Fair Warning, congressmen on both sides on the aisle, in both the Senate and in the House, have co-sponsored legislation that would issue a bevy of tax breaks for stateside craft beer, wine and liquor distilleries, the “Craft Beverage Modernization and Tax Reform Act of 2017.”

One of the minor provisions, however, could have a wider impact on the amount of alcohol typically found in wine. It calls for the easing of a “sin tax” that penalized winemakers for producing wine with an alcohol content higher than 14 percent. The limit before the tax kicks in would be raised to 16 percent instead.

In recent years, as customers have gravitated towards sweeter wines, winemakers have let their grapes ripen longer, raising both the sugar and alcohol content of their wines, and requiring many to spend more resources to then lower the latter, lest they run afoul of the tax.

“Oregon’s economy earns significant benefits from the jobs and small business growth created by our state’s world-renowned craft beer, wine and spirits producers,” said Senator Ron Wyden (D-Oregon), the main sponsor of the bill, in a [statement](#) released soon after introducing the proposal earlier this January. “This bill would ensure these industries no longer face the unfair burdens of Prohibition-era rules and taxes.”

The Senate bill has 44 Democratic and Republican cosponsors, and the House bill has 171, indicating its strong support. At this point, though, there’s no indication when it might come to either floor. An earlier version of the bill in 2015 had failed to advance past a congressional committee.

The wine provision appears to be a cousin of similar attempts to lessen the tax and regulatory burden of craft beer makers, whose hardy products often contain a higher than regularly seen alcohol content. Elsewhere, other recently passed state laws in [Alabama](#), [Ohio](#), and [Tennessee](#) have allowed companies and stores to produce and sell so-called “high-gravity” craft beer.

Stoked as wine moms might be at getting more bang for their buck, though, some public health advocates are none too pleased.

“The industry is already obsessed with unnecessarily high alcohol-by-volume products,” said Michael Scippa, the Public Affairs director of watchdog non-profit Alcohol Justice, in a [statement](#). “There’s no sane reason to remove an effective economic brake on this alcohol content race.”

The organization notes that affected wines would be around 15 percent stronger than before under the new provision, while the bill’s tax cuts in general would reduce the amount of government revenue available to fund alcohol harm prevention programs. How much the new bill, should it become law, would affect the typical alcohol content of wines is an open question, though.