The current Massachusetts bottle law, as established in 1982, places a five-cent deposit onto beverage containers for beer, malt, carbonated soft drinks, and sparkling water but excludes non-carbonated beverages, which have become increasingly popular since the bill became law 30 years ago. Updating the bottle bill will provide revenue to re-establish the Clean Environment Fund, which will focus on initiatives such as recycling and waste-reduction while creating jobs in the process and will save the Commonwealth money that is otherwise spent dealing with litter and trash.

**The Bill**

Bill H.890: “An Act Updating the Bottle Bill”

**Excerpt from Storybook**

Phillip Sego, Massachusetts Sierra Club Legislative Action and Political Chair, strongly supports the Bottle Bill. He sees not only an environmental issue at hand, but also a financial one. He points out that as the non-deposit bottle industry has grown “litter is increasing not only on streets but also in storm drains which presents problems to municipalities.” Sego says the trick is to get litter before it starts.

Sego also pointed out that when the Bottle Bill was passed in 1983, Massachusetts used 1 billion bottles annually, the vast majority of which became deposit. Today, we use 3.3 billion bottles, but 1 billion of them are non-deposit. This increase in non-carbonated beverages brings us back to where we were before the Bottle Bill was passed in 1983.

**Elevator Speech**

We believe in prosperity, clean communities, and not tripping on bottles on your way to work in the morning. Did you know that each year we throw about 1.1 billion beverage containers? That’s enough to fill Fenway Park five times! These bottles could all be recycled but they are not. In Massachusetts we currently have a law called the bottle bill. This places a five-cent deposit onto carbonated beverage containers and significantly increases their recycling rates. Our current
state bottle bill which was first implemented in 1983 is now outdated. It does not cover non-carbonated beverages such as tea, water, juice, and sports drinks. We now use an estimated 30,000 tons of these bottles per year. Once our thirst is quenched we place these bottles in landfills, we burn them in incinerators, and we toss them in our communities. This hurts our economy, our health, and our environment – but there is an easy solution! Updating the bottle bill to cover our non-carbonated beverage containers is the best way to fix this problem. The bill is a win for our economy, our health, and our environment.

Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Geneva
I met with Sierra Club’s legislative and political action chair Phil Sego over Skype near the beginning of the semester. The reason for the meeting was because I wanted to find out more about the Bottle Bill and the reasoning behind it. That I certainly learned in spades. Phil was full of tidbits that did not crop up immediately on Google – like that emergency rooms saw a 70-80% decrease in glass lacerations after the first bottle bill passed because people walking around were getting glass cuts in their feet.

Phil talked a lot about what Massachusetts looked like before the Bottle Bill – so I really got an image of how effective it was. He also talked about the politics of the Bottle Bill, and how money from corporations was a big part of it. The reason the Bottle Bill didn’t pass immediately was because corporations were buying politicians off. He also said the reason we weren’t going after non-carbonated alcohol was because the alcohol industry is loaded – and would definitely be willing to pour monetary resources into fighting the Bottle Bill. This isn’t the message heard from Beacon Hill, to be sure. Governor Patrick has said he didn’t want to overwhelm people with increased prices on alcohol because they had recently pursued an increase in sales tax on the substance.

It was good to connect with Phil and he made it clear that the door was open. … I think my enthusiasm for the project worked well and the fact that he knew that I was a creative person who could put my creativity to use in this campaign. When the other party knows you’re bringing something to the table they tend to be a lot more eager to help you.

Rachel
On our first visit to the State House Geneva and I attended an event to show business’ support for the bottle bill. The event was hosted by MASSPIRG and took place in a small meeting room in the State House on February 14th. The room was packed with representatives from different environmental organizations, small business owners, legislators, and constituents. As Geneva and I walked into the room she said hello to different lobbyists that she had worked with in her previous experience. I sat and took notes as different business owners discussed the impacts of the bottle bill and the economic as well as environmental benefits of the bill.

Going to this event helped me to not only understand how the bill positively impacts small businesses but also how this bill affects communities. The event instilled a sense of excitement that the bottle bill was not purely and unemotionally an environmental issue but impacts everyone in Massachusetts.

At the end of the event Geneva and I introduced ourselves to Janet Domenitz, the director of MASSPIRG. This proved to be extremely helpful in eventually guiding me to Abe Scarr, who works with students through MASSPIRG. Abe has been invaluable throughout the semester in providing current and relevant information about the bottle bill as well as legislators to contact.

Update
As of July 31, 2012 the bottle bill was killed by the Joint Conference Committee which removed the bill from a pending jobs bill. (The bottle bill was attached to this bill in the Senate but not in the House.)

For more information
Massachusetts Coalition to Update the Bottle Bill
http://www.bottlebill.org