

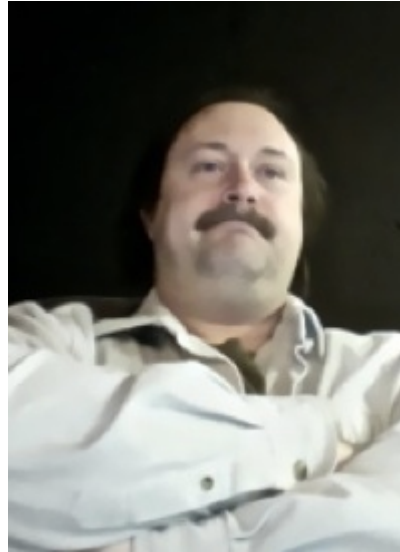


Written by [Dennis Behreandt](#) on March 10, 2010

## The Keystone Kops' Great Beer Bust

Time for an axiom: Big Government is Bad. Or, put another way, power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely. Or, maybe another one: big government is the last, best refuge of scoundrels. Case in point, the three taverns in Philadelphia busted recently by cops in armed, simultaneous raids.

Were the cops after narcotics? How about organized crime? Maybe terrorists? Nope, none of these. In fact, the bars raided by the Keystone State's best were guilty of selling beer (gasp!).



As recounted by *Philly.com*, "more than a dozen armed State Police officers conducted simultaneous raids last week on three popular Philadelphia bars known for their wide beer selections. The cops confiscated hundreds of bottles of expensive ales and lagers, now in State Police custody at an undisclosed location." Does that mean they are in [Cheney's bunker](#)? Were the beers subject to a Keystone Kops version of [extraordinary rendition](#)?

The draconian raid was brought on, in best East German police state fashion, by a secret informant who snitched on the bars for selling beers that, while otherwise entirely legal, hadn't been registered with the proper state [commissariat](#).

Again, according to *Philly.com*: "Although the bar owners had bought the beer legally from licensed Pennsylvania distributors and had paid all the necessary taxes, the police claimed that nobody had registered the precise names of the beers with the state Liquor Control Board - a process that requires the brewers or their importers to pay a \$75 registration fee for each product they want to sell in Pennsylvania."

As a result, small business owners Leigh Maida and her husband, Brendan Hartranft, have suffered a severe financial setback to their operations. The state confiscated four kegs and 317 bottles of beer, totaling 60.9 gallons. The total value of loot stolen amounts to \$7,200, according to Maida.

Make no mistake, "stolen" is the correct description for what happened to the beer inventory in question. Maida and Hartranft conducted a legal transaction for a legal and common substance, even paying the state's taxes on the sale. They took rightful possession of the beer as a result. In other words, it became their property. But, because of the armed raid, they no longer own, nor can they sell, some of the beer that is rightfully theirs. Their basic rights and freedoms have been flagrantly and tyrannically violated by the state.

In an email to the *Philadelphia Daily News*, Maida decried the state's heavy handed tactics. "No actual investigating was done," she said. "The police sent a shoddily typed list to the PLCB, some drone fed it into the machine verbatim and returned what came back, without . . . even trying to offer us the benefit of the doubt by double-checking on some of the so-called unregistered beers."

Now, she said, "the onus is on us to prove our innocence."



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Meanwhile, the expensive craft-brewed beers face an uncertain future. William La Torre, the commanding officer of the Philadelphia office of the Bureau of Liquor Control Enforcement said, according to reports, that the beer would be kept in a secure location until the case is resolved in 6 or 8 months. If it's found that the offending beers were indeed unregistered, reported *Philly.com*, "the State Police typically would seek a forfeiture order to destroy the beer," La Torre said.

If anything, this case amply demonstrates the banality of bureaucratic governmental stupidity. While the average citizen beer drinker may just shake his or her head in cynical wonder at examples like this of bureaucratic failure, ultimately it is no laughing matter. As this case illustrates, unnecessary government bureaucracy is economically harmful.

In this instance, not only were small business owners Maida and Hartranft financially harmed by the state, but the regulation requiring registration of the brand names of beers sold in the state causes a hardship on numerous other businesses.

"Industry sources complain that brand registration is typical of the onerous regulations that make selling beer in Pennsylvania difficult. For example, while it is the responsibility of the brewer or importer to submit the necessary paperwork and registration fee, it is the tavern or restaurant licensee who may be liable for selling unregistered brands, they said," reported *Philly.com*

Heck, even the Heineken-owned [Hacker-Pschorr](#) — one of the big brewery brands — is apparently unregistered, and therefore illegal, in Pennsylvania.

And this is just in the brewing industry, and just in Pennsylvania. Add to the bureaucratic stew the varying laws, regulations, and agencies that have proliferated in the 50 states, season liberally with gargantuan helpings of federal law and regulation, and the result obtained is a thick, impenetrable, and unpalatable gumbo of anti-business, anti-market, freedom-choking bureaucracy that threatens to undermine the economic well-being of the entire nation, if not the world.

Oh wait, that [already happened](#).

Perhaps its time to drown our sorrows in a mug of legal beer, if one can be found.

**Dennis Behreandt** is a contributor to *The New American* magazine. Visit his blog and archives [here](#).



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