

# HOW WE SEE IT

## Alcohol Law Changes Reasonable

Prohibition didn't work at the national level back in the last century. Maintaining outdated liquor sales laws in the 21st century, likewise, doesn't seem to be a good idea. When voters in Benton County, Springdale and Tontitown go to the polls Tuesday (or before for early voting), the issue of how those communities deal with alcohol sales will be on the ballot.

First, let's consider Benton County's measure. A campaign well-financed by members of the Walton family managed to get enough signatures to place the question of legalizing the sale of liquor and other alcohol at retail stores before voters. Historically in Arkansas, that's the biggest hurdle. In recent years, once the decision was left to a public vote, residents have chose to go "wet."

Benton County has long been known as the wettest dry county in Arkansas because of its large number of private club permits. Liquor stores just across the county line supply plenty of homes and businesses with libations. Nobody argues alcohol isn't present in "dry" Benton County.

So the question really focuses on the merits, or lack of merits, of selling alcohol more directly to a public that's already consuming it. While some would like to maintain a grip on quaint legal splitting of hairs, we're of a mind that it makes sense to address reality.

Keep Dollars in Benton County, the group supporting Tuesday's vote, has rightly shown adherence to a ban on retail alcohol sales is sending millions of local dollars across the county line unnecessarily. A University of Arkansas study, funded by the group, estimated the money spent locally would mean about \$1.4 million in added sales taxes for cities and nearly \$800,000 for the county.

We hear the fears about more crime, but it doesn't ring true. When alcohol is sold nearby and consumed liberally within the boundaries of the county already, it's hard to see that "going wet" will convert Benton County into the crime capital of the nation.

The question is whether the existing demand for alcohol should create economic activity for Benton County and tax revenue for the county and cities.

We support a vote for expanded alcohol sales because it makes sense to keep that economic activity local and it seems ludicrous to force people to drive up the highway for a product they'll use locally.

### SPRINGDALE, TONTITOWN MEASURES

In Springdale and Tontitown, the question isn't about being wet, but getting wetter.

The situation again presents an opportunity for the community to reflect reality rather than some Mayberry-ish notion that nobody consumes alcohol on Sunday.

Springdale's vote would allow retails alcohol sales on Sunday. It's a response to the possibility Benton County will go wet, leading to a reduction in sales in Springdale stores.

Tontitown's measure would also allow retail sales on Sunday, but the city also has a ballot issue to allow on-premises (restaurant) alcohol sales on Sunday.

Churches have mostly remained quiet on the measures, reflecting the shift of attitudes or at least the hesitance of the faithful to stand up to the momentum of change.

Consumption of alcohol isn't viewed as the "sin" it once was, although abuse of alcohol is. The availability of alcohol sales, however, doesn't determine whether one is a consumer or an abuser.

Moderation is vital in the consumption of alcohol, and it should be applied as well in the legal approach to its availability. Maintaining alcohol sales limits that our communities have clearly outgrown doesn't make sense.

We recommend a vote for these reasonable changes to local alcohol laws.