



## Alcohol: Do We Need More?

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The issue of whether or not to have Sunday alcohol sales has been mistakenly framed in an overly religious tone. While it is agreed that many of the original reasons for restricting Sunday sales were related to Christianity and its roots in our founding society; it is not limited to that reason.

I believe the broader and more far reaching reason to maintain Sunday restrictions has more to do with basic public health and safety than with someone's religious conviction. Now, I don't say this to negate the fact that personally I don't believe in drinking. However, when it comes to public policy it must address more than my personal conviction. Therefore, the real issue in continuing "any" restrictions on the use of alcohol needs to be based on basic public health and safety issues.

This being true, the question is not whether the use of alcohol agrees with my religious tenet, but is it in the best interest of our community's health and safety to have more availability for the consumption of alcohol?

As Joe Friday might say, *"let's look at the facts and nothing but the facts..."* Did you know that almost half of all traffic fatalities are in some way alcohol related? A fourth of all emergency room admissions are alcohol related. A third of all suicides and half of all domestic violence homicides are alcohol related. In fact, alcohol consumption is the third highest cause of death in the United States. And according to another source, alcohol abuse is America's number one drug problem.

Here is a statistic that I was not aware of. A study done between 1997 and 2002 showed that of the nearly 2,400 children who died in traffic accidents involving alcohol, 1588 (68%) were passengers with drivers who were under the influence of alcohol!

I could go on and on with other outrageous statistics but I think your own experiences with family and friends will further substantiate these facts. However, I will mention one more documented fact. Increased availability, accessibility and frequency of use of alcohol increases the dangers to public health and safety!

Whether it is violent assaults, problems associated with interpersonal relationships, or spouse and child abuse, all are enhanced and increased when alcohol is more readily available and accessible. Those are the facts!

Which brings us back to the Sunday sales issue. Sure, it started out as a religious issue mainly related to Christians. But, then again so were murder, stealing, and lying. I cannot imagine anyone wanting to repeal the laws related to those acts simply because Christians think they are wrong. These are also public health and safety issues that just happen to be deeply rooted in traditionally held moral beliefs.

This point was also seen when abstinence teaching was first introduced into the public schools. It was eventually brought to the U.S. Supreme Court for a ruling. They ruled in favor of allowing abstinence teaching in the schools because it had public health and safety issues that exceeded whatever religious reasons some may have had for the support of the teaching.

You see, the public health and safety concern is something we can all agree on. So, I ask the question: "is the public health and safety of our community better served by more alcohol?" Folks, we realized the effects of smoking on our society and made changes to better protect ourselves and future generations. When smoking and the consumption of alcohol are compared which seems worse? While it has been proven that smoking adversely affects even the non-

smoker; it has never been asserted that smoking while driving endangers others. Yet, we know that alcohol not only has long-term effects on the one who drinks, but it also impairs their ability to drive and can even cause traffic fatalities. So, why shouldn't we realize the detrimental impact that more alcohol sales would have on our society and therefore continue to have restrictions?

Case in point. When New Mexico lifted the ban on Sunday sales of packaged alcohol, alcohol related crashes increased by 29% and alcohol related fatalities increased by 42% on Sundays alone. These increases were connected to a five year period following the repeal of blue laws regarding Sunday alcohol sales. This was a sharp contrast to what was promised by advocates who said the repeal would reduce alcohol related crashes and fatalities. In fact, it had just the opposite effect.

So, I ask the question again, "Alcohol, do we really need more?" I think not. Not even on Sundays.

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