



Senate Bill 384 (Wiener's 1st attempt in 2017) proposed allowing local governments to decide whether to extended alcohol service hours as late as 4 a.m. (Emma Chiang/Special to SF Weekly)

California's zombie 4 a.m. bar bill lacks justification

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Opinion

Arguments for California to allow alcohol sales until 4 a.m. stagger around like a lost zombie. Supporters of the 4 a.m. bar bill keep coming back with new arguments to hide unavoidable truths: later bar closing times are harmful to neighborhoods, commuters and young adults but profitable for a few night clubs, hotels and restaurants. State Sen. Scott Wiener (D-San Francisco) promotes Senate Bill 58, zombie legislation [his third attempt in three years] that haunts the lives of California's residents driving to work or simply trying to sleep. Here are some of the specious arguments and responses.

"It is good for local control; one size should not fit all."

SB 58 would create experimental party zones in ten California cities. Those cities would unleash early morning impaired motorists to other towns that have absolutely no local control over those trial party zones. A 4 a.m. party district in the Castro or SOMA would be untouchable by San Mateo, Marin or Contra Costa – but commuters in those suburban counties would be vulnerable to impaired and drowsy drivers causing morning rush hour traffic pile-ups from highway collisions.

Wiener created a tortuous acronym for SB 58, "Let Our Communities Adjust Late-Night Act," the LOCAL act. It is odd to hear him tout local control of later hours while his controversial SB 50 would explicitly strip away local control, allowing the state to up-zone housing near mass transit, trumping local zoning and master planning.

“Not everyone works 24-7, they need the extra two hours to celebrate.”

Far fewer people will be threatened if those who need to celebrate in the wee hours would do so at private parties, or just take a hike in the morning instead of drinking late.

“It will save the gay bars”

Two more hours of inebriation will not rescue unprofitable bars. The LGBT community is exercising more and trying to drink less, while the economics of gay bars suffers from higher commercial rents. Gay bars and night-clubs are culturally and socially important, but over-consumption of alcohol is correlated with unsafe sex, the spread of HIV virus, domestic violence and victimization. The band should not play on to 4 a.m.

“The extra two hours contribute to harm reduction”

Bars supporting later last calls want to sell more alcohol for more profit. “Harm reduction” means staying open without serving alcohol. I vehemently support any bars like those in San Jose that stay open longer to sober up.

“This is good for hotel and restaurant workers”

The hotel worker union slogan, “one job should be enough,” becomes a joke if the one job has to be a graveyard shift that ends at 4:30 or 5 in the morning. A decent wage for an eight- hour shift is what restaurant, hotel and bar workers need, not a graveyard shift.

“It’s good for the conventions and tourism.”

Wrong. People do not come to the Golden State to over-consume alcohol.

“You can take a ride share home”

Without real night owl mass transportation in California, 4 a.m. partiers will drive. Ridesharing becomes prohibitively expensive when you start crossing city and county lines. “Drink commuters” will hop in their own cars at 2 a.m. to get to party zones, then drive home more inebriated and sleep-deprived after 4 a.m.

“There is no science to oppose 4 a.m. bar times”

That is simply a lie. Dozens of national and international studies conducted over decades have documented that extending bar times by just two hours adds DUIs, highway deaths, emergency room visits, street violence and crime. The California Highway Patrol, Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC), and just about every police officer you could ask thinks a 4 a.m. closing time is a disaster waiting to happen.

“All the cool cities have later bar times”

Not true again, as only a few locations allow any later hours. Las Vegas and New Orleans have pedestrian or taxi modes of transportation, and New York and Chicago have quite pricey licenses for later times and well-developed, late-night transportation.

California is cool without the booze. Governor Jerry Brown, heeding the advice of the CHP, wisely vetoed last year’s bar bill with these words: *“I believe we have enough mischief from midnight to 2 without adding two more hours of mayhem.”*

Wiener’s latest 4 a.m. bar bill attempts to justify a dangerous experiment in random cities as “celebratory” giggles and fun. Protecting public health and safety by killing SB 58 can be as easy as poking the Night King with the pointy end of a Valyrian steel knife.

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