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Beach alcohol ban — why not just reinstate prohibition?

By John Gregory

In Kentucky it's illegal to carry an ice cream cone in your back pocket. It's against the law for children to attend school with onions on their breath in West Virginia, dogs aren't allowed to smoke cigars in Illinois, and Vermont law declares that everyone must take a bath on Saturday.

These are just a few of the archaic laws still on the books in some areas of the nation. But California is not without its backward ways. Some years ago the San Diego City Council voted to cut alcohol consumption on our beaches from the hours of 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. A few years later the council decided to extend the ban from 8 p.m. until noon. Now, the City Council is considering a law to ban alcohol consumption on city beaches altogether. So, another piece of our freedom may be chipped away as government meddles in our lives.

The alleged concern is that alcohol consumption on our beaches causes the crime rate to skyrocket. However, supporters of this ban have flimsy evidence to support their claims. They point to police statistics showing that a majority of arrests near the beaches are alcohol related.

But what they can't pinpoint is where these culprits became intoxicated. Was it in the bars or restaurants, or did they drink in the homes within the beach neighborhoods? This opens a whole can of worms. If the issue is drinking on the beach today, tomorrow our leaders will have to address drinking on the patios and in the private yards near the beaches. Then it comes down to intoxication taking place inside the homes when drunken residents become too noisy and eventually spill out into the neighborhoods and, yes, the beaches.

Some alcohol ban proponents claim that people are drawn from all over to San Diego beaches because San Diego has the only California beaches left to drink on. But that's a weak claim. First of all, several other California beaches allow alcohol consumption, including Del Mar, Torrey Pines, Silver Strand, Carmel, Monterey, Santa Cruz and San Francisco beaches.

Then we must examine the fact that a majority of beachgoers aren't attracted to the shore because it's a good place to drink. Other factors — the sun, the surf, the sand — couldn't possibly attract anyone. Besides, there are lots of other, more convenient places to drink.

Drinking is not even the heart of the dilemma, nor is it the only problem. Let's face it, the beach draws all types, including those who get out of control when they drink and yes, even criminals who break laws without drinking. These are public beaches. What should we do — restrict who can enter?

Furthermore, problems continue as visitors mob our beaches, especially on the holidays. There are three main problem days each year: Memorial Day, the Fourth of July and Labor Day. Perhaps they can ban alcohol on those three-day weekends, or better yet, ban people from the beaches.

Of course the proposed alcohol ban is a great way for politicians to grandstand under the veil of concern for public safety. Well, the citizens are fed up with politicians telling the public what's good for them. Hypocrisy is the order of the day and fairness has nothing to do with this policy. Why not just reinstate prohibition? That went over real well.

The city's leaders can't find a way to build a new airport or a new ballpark — think they can stop public intoxication and general rowdiness by creating another law? Keep dreaming. Someone needs to be more clever.

Some think passing one more law is the answer, then they ignore the enforcement issue. There already is a law against public intoxication — why isn't it being enforced? Why not refine that law and further fund the enforcement? Let's give our law officers a helping hand.

The law abiding citizens who simply wish to enjoy a relaxing drink while sharing the sunset are not the ones inclined to become disorderly, but they are the ones who will suffer if the ban is passed. The real culprits are the small percentage of belligerents, some of them transients, who will drink any time and at any place, anyway. The problem won't go away until society learns to face and deal with that problem first. But most just turn away.

No, drinking alcohol on a public beach is not a right guaranteed by the Constitution. It's a simple liberty, and God knows we have too few of those today. Of course no one has to drink on the beach. It's not a necessity and the world won't come to an end if this measure is passed. On the other hand, we've gotten by pretty well so far without it. The proposed ordinance is just another misdirected concern — one more law for the books. It's not worth the paint used on the signs to post it, and it won't be enforced successfully because, apparently, the law can't possibly enforce the rules as they stand. Give the police more funds to provide safety in our neighborhoods and beaches, but don't limit our freedoms.