



Senate Bill 384 would allow municipalities to extend last call for alcohol until 4 a.m. **Jose Luis Villegas** - Sacramento Bee file

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## Extending last call a backward move for California

BY PATRICK R. KRILL  
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One of the primary arguments being advanced in support of Senate Bill 384 – legislation that would allow municipalities to extend last call for alcohol until 4 a.m. – is that it would bring California nightlife in line with places like New York, Chicago, Miami and New Orleans. Perhaps the alcohol lobby doesn't understand that most good things start in California, not come to it by way of mimicry.

Citing a “competitive disadvantage” to other cities around the country, advocates of SB 384 point to an economic upside – greatly increased revenue for the alcohol, hospitality and late-night entertainment industries – while curiously glossing over or disregarding the significant economic, safety and social downsides. Such a one-sided analysis is reckless and irresponsible.

As it stands, excessive alcohol consumption already costs California more than any other state – a staggering [\\$35 billion per year](#) – and there is no reason to believe that extending last call to one or two hours before dawn is going to do anything but significantly increase that number. As if the financial drain caused by excessive drinking wasn't bad enough, California also has some of the [lowest](#) alcohol taxes in the nation, and therefore recoups far less of those losses than most other states. For purposes of illustration, the tax on distilled spirits in California is roughly [one-tenth](#) of what it is in the state of Washington.

If members of the Legislature are truly so concerned about being out of sync with other states when it comes to alcohol policy, maybe they should start by pursuing the increase in alcohol taxes that the [strong majority](#) of Californians *actually favor*, and which would bear a more rational relationship to the economic harm the state suffers at the hands of drinking. Of course, in order to do that, they would need to buck the alcohol lobby which donates [so generously](#) to many of their campaigns.

With the almost self-parodying title of “Let Our Communities Adjust Late Night Act,” the proposed legislation also seems to absurdly suggest that local communities exist in hermetically-sealed isolation from one another, and that the late-night activities in one will not have a direct effect on others. In the state with the most licensed drivers in the country, and many sprawling urban areas that contain numerous contiguous “communities,” any notion that closing times for bars should be a local matter amounts to nothing more than distractive window dressing on an otherwise dubious proposal.

April is Alcohol Awareness month, and is therefore a good time to reflect on the enormous toll that alcohol already exacts on our nation, and on California. In my work with the legal profession and the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation, I am regularly reminded that alcohol remains our most pervasive and [deadliest drug](#).

It is involved in more homicides than all other drugs combined, and is especially common in sexual assault and intimate-partner violence. It kills [88,000 people](#) a year in the United States – making it the fourth-leading cause of preventable death – and is behind one-third of auto fatalities. It costs our country a quarter of a trillion dollars per year in medical and public safety expenses, and lost productivity.

It greatly increases the risk of cancers of the mouth, esophagus, pharynx, larynx, liver and breast; is a factor in [more than 200](#) disease and injury conditions; and causes fully one-quarter of all deaths in the 20-39 age range – the same age range that would almost certainly be the most likely to take advantage of extended drinking hours.

Can we really afford to make these numbers any worse?

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