

Marin Voice: Government under the influence of craft brewers and distillers

By Bruce Lee Livingston

04/03/15

The methodical and deliberate dismantling of California's alcohol regulations continues this year in Sacramento.

Marin's Assemblyman Marc Levine, D-San Rafael, leads the legislative assault on public health and safety with two more bills.

Not only is Levine on the pro-alcohol industry Assembly Committee on Governmental Organization, he is now carrying water for the burgeoning "craft" industry as chair of the Assembly Select Committee on Craft Brewing and Distilling.

Not coincidentally, the IJ reported he took over \$47,000 from alcohol interests in the last year and a half.

Levine's [AB 774](#) would allow a certified farmers market sales permit to be issued to a licensed beer manufacturer to allow an "instructional tasting event" at a farmers' market or community event area adjacent to it.

If AB 774 passes it will increase availability of alcohol retail sales and threaten public health and safety. This builds on Levine's success last year in allowing wine tastings at farmers markets — making the legislative assault look deliberate and staged. Generations of evidence support that when alcohol availability increases, so does alcohol-related harm.

The California Department of [Alcoholic Beverage Control \(ABC\)](#) is constitutionally mandated to monitor and enforce alcohol laws, but lacks the resources and authority to do the job at farmers markets.

According to the [California State Law Enforcement Association](#), there are only 123 agents dealing with enforcement for the entire state. With more than 98,000 permanent alcohol licenses in California, and an additional 45,000-plus temporary licenses granted annually, the ability for those few agents to protect the health and safety of Californians is an illusion.

Passage of AB 774 would only add to the already impossible workload.

According to the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), between 2006-10, California lost an average of 10,572 lives each year due to alcohol-related causes. The public is damaged by \$31.8 billion in annual costs from alcohol-related harm, of which the government burden is \$13.7 billion.

Levine and his legislative cohort look through booze goggles fogged by alcohol industry campaign contributions. The creeping normality of this industry influence is disturbing.

Levine's second bill, [AB 1233](#), would allow a distilled spirits manufacturer to sell up to three bottles to each person at a tasting on the licensee's premises.

Levine is by no means alone in this effort to incrementally, perhaps exponentially, expand venues for drinking. Marin's new state senator, Mike McGuire, a Democrat from Healdsburg, also joined the club this year by authoring a new public health threat.

[SB 685](#) would expand veterans' club alcohol licensees to serve the general public.

My own favorite disgusting bill is authored by Assemblyman Tom Daly, D-Anaheim. [AB 1322](#) would allow tens of thousands of beauty parlors and barber shops in California to serve alcohol without a license, as long as they don't raise the price of the haircut.

Really?

Who will monitor the drink sizes, the number of drinks served, the age of the barbers serving booze, or the underage clients getting a free one?

Once again, it's death by a million cuts.

By [Alcohol Justice's](#) latest count there are currently at least 15 separate bills this session that, if passed, will chip away at alcohol controls protecting health and safety in California.

Levine, McGuire and Daly are feeding a toxic codependency with the alcohol industry resulting in expanded alcohol availability and more death, disease and injury.

We invite [constituents to take action](#) at AlcoholJustice.org, and oppose unrelenting alcohol deregulation by state government.

Bruce Lee Livingston is the executive director and CEO of the San Rafael-based Alcohol Justice, one of the three 1987 "major projects" created and supported by the Buck Trust.

