

Political Blotter

Politics in the Bay Area and beyond



[Proposed measure would drop drinking age to 18](#)

By Josh Richman

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Terrance Lynn doesn't see himself as the new patron saint of college keggers, but his proposed ballot measure to lower California's drinking age from 21 to 18 might get him there nonetheless.

Lynn, 42, of Portola Valley, sees it as a civil-rights issue. "There is no kind of 'junior citizen' status – you're either an adult or you're not" except when it comes to drinking, he said; 18-year-olds can be held criminally liable as adults and can volunteer or be drafted into the military, yet can't legally buy a beer.

Alcohol enforcement, like the war on drugs, often has a disproportionate socio-economic impact, Lynn added: A Stanford student caught drinking a beer might get a pass or at least have an easy time clearing his or her record, while a poor kid from East Palo Alto could face more serious repercussions. And making it legal for college-age people to drink could help reduce binge-drinking by bringing campus consumption out of the shadows, he said.

Lynn acknowledged that while 18-to-20-year-olds would "obviously vote their self interest on this," that age group usually doesn't go to the polls in great numbers – though if this won't bring them out, he can't imagine what will.

This would run afoul of the National Minimum Drinking Age Act of 1984, which punishes states that allow those under 21 to drink by reducing annual federal highway funds by 10 percent. Lynn believes that with California's clout in D.C. – its huge congressional delegation, and the fact that it pays a lot more in federal taxes than it gets back – "I can't imagine that situation would last for long."

Michael Scippa, public affairs director at San Rafael-based [Alcohol Justice](#), said Lynn isn't the first and won't be the last to propose reducing the minimum legal drinking age, but "from a public health perspective, it's extremely foolish and there's no reason to do it."

Scippa said there's "an overwhelming body of scientific evidence... case after case, study after study" showing that barring drinking until age 21 reduces youth drinking and alcohol-related harm, especially on the roads. Reducing the age to 18 would mean "we'd start seeing a spike (in drinking) at 16," he said. "We don't want to go backwards here – it's such a public health and safety success story. The only people who would benefit from this are alcohol producers."

Lynn, a tech-company chief financial officer making his first foray into public policy, has submitted [another proposed measure](#) that would strip party affiliation from ballot designations so that it would be harder to see and vote a straight party line. "This labeling and partisan generalization is really hurting us in the national dialog," he said. "It's a tool of the powerful to control the ignorant."

And he's working on a third measure that would impose a 1000 percent sales tax on all political advertisements in California, with all revenue going to public schools; Lynn said it's a way to counter the avalanche of money in politics since the U.S. Supreme Court's Citizens United decision. (A true "sin tax," some might say.)

There's little chance of any of these making it onto 2016's ballot. Lynn said he can't spend much money on them beyond fees for filing and [website-hosting](#): "Nothing beyond the bare minimum... I don't have the wherewithal to do it, and I wouldn't be inclined to if I did." He's hoping they'll catch fire on social media and, once he's cleared to start circulating petitions, will become a true grassroots signature-gathering campaign.

The public-comment periods for Lynn's [drinking-age measure](#) and the [party-affiliation measure](#) last through Sept. 24.