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State's alcohol laws serve Michigan well

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The Mackinac Center's recent column in the Times Herald regarding Michigan's alcohol laws does not give the big picture of a system that historically has been successful. Talk to any number of Michigan brewers or large national brewers and there is no doubt that the partnership between beer-maker and distributor fuels growth and jobs in Michigan.

Earl Smith Distributing has developed successful partnerships with dozens of brewers, importers and many of the 80 craft brewers and brew pubs here in Michigan. Craft brewers here in Michigan have flourished with the help of creative partnerships with family-owned businesses such as ours. The brewers focus on making beer, while we focus on delivering beer to over 600 retail customers. We have been in business for over 78 years providing many jobs with good wages and benefits.

The Center's claim that Michigan's alcohol laws discourage competition is inaccurate. In June alone, 47 new brands of beer entered the Michigan market.

Amid wide choice, Michigan's alcohol laws have increased exposure to Michigan products, allowed manufacturers to tap into the marketing and merchandising expertise of the distributors, and kept tainted products off the shelves, all in an accountable and transparent manner.

Despite the center's claims, the state does not set distribution territories. Brewers and wineries do and the number of distributor licenses is not restricted. As a result of this competitive climate, Michigan has 138 licensed distributors, more than states of comparable size.

While brewers and distributors support modernizing regulations, it is important to remember that both our private companies are succeeding today because of Michigan's alcohol laws, which balance competitiveness with the public good.

Sales of Michigan beers are up. So is responsibility and moderation. We must be doing something right.

ROBERT E. SMITH

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