

Winning formula Regulations benefit Michigan industries and protect citizens

(Editor's note: Michael G. Lasher, vice president of M2M Distributors in Lansing, responds to last week's Uncorked column by Michael Brenton, in which he criticized proposed regulation of Michigan's wine industry. The Uncorked column is online at www.lansingcitypulse.com.)

By MICHAEL G. LASHER

Michigan citizens, Michigan jobs and Michigan values.

They define the parameters of Michigan's system regulating the sale and distribution of alcohol. For more than 76 years, this system has worked. It continues to be refined so businesses, regulators, law enforcement and others can keep up with the changing times.

Michigan's alcohol regulations are acknowledged as among the most progressive in the nation.

**Guest
Columnist**

They have helped make Michigan the Great Beer State, with more than 70 small craft brewers and brewpubs producing acclaimed beers and creating local jobs. They help make Michigan a top wine state, producing more than 1 million gallons of quality wine every year. And they help family-owned distributors grow, give back to their communities and employ more than 5,300 people in good-paying jobs with health care and benefits.

Michigan's alcohol regulations are based on a simple formula. One party produces the product. One party buys the product from the producer and distributes it to local stores and restaurants. And one party — the store or restaurant — sells that product to adult consumers, after checking an ID and verifying that the person is at least 21 years old.

This system ensures every party is fully accountable for the product at every step, increasing our ability to track the product and collect taxes that pay for essential public services. This system also helps law enforcement fight illegal underage drinking, prevents tainted products from reaching consumers and promotes moderation among adult consumers.

Michael Brenton's recent attack against legislation that aims to increase accountability, protect consumers and protect Michigan jobs suggests a poor grasp of Michigan's alcohol laws.

Mr. Brenton needs an education why alcohol must be treated different from, say, toothpaste, paper clips and other benign consumer products.

Among responsible adults, an alcoholic drink can be a pleasure, but in the wrong hands, it can put lives at risk. That's why the regulations Mr. Brenton so casually dismisses are extremely important to keep

people safe without going backward to the era of Prohibition.

Exhibit One: About two decades ago, Britain began deregulating its alcohol laws. As a result, Britain today faces an epidemic of binge drinking and alcohol abuse that is devastating its people. A story in the April 8, 2010, edition of The Wall Street Journal reports that alcohol consumption in Britain has soared nearly 20 percent between 1980 and 2007, while in the United States consumption plunged 17 percent because of tough alcohol regulations like what we have in Michigan.

Exhibit Two: A recent statewide recall of a beer product in Michigan was resolved within 72 hours. At a time when people die from contaminated peanut butter and eggs because tracking down the culprits can take

months, even years, Michigan's system of alcohol control is a model for how food and beverages should be distributed. Part of that system's strength lies in maintaining the territorial integrity of the distribution of beer, meaning one producer sells a product to one distributor who distributes the product to retailers and restaurants in one geographic area.

Both cases prove alcohol regulations promote moderation and consumer safety. They also promote consumer choice.

In Michigan, wine is the only alcoholic beverage that doesn't follow territorial integrity, as spirits and beer do. Territorial integrity has helped Michigan's craft beer sector grow by holding distributors accountable for their sales numbers and compelling them to work hard for a product, while helping craft beers penetrate into more markets.

The system is working for beer. It will work for wine.

Michigan's alcohol laws mirror our values and priorities. Our laws balance consumers' desire for buying wine online with the concern of families and law enforcement to keep alcohol away from teens. Mr. Brenton won't acknowledge that, yet he wants to open the floodgates to more direct alcohol purchases. Unconvincingly, he argues that wine aficionados' online access to the latest boutique Tokay from Slovakia trumps the very real concerns of hardworking parents across Michigan who want to keep an abyss between alcohol and their kids.

On alcohol regulations, Michigan is on the right path. We are strengthening accountability and helping Michigan businesses compete and create local jobs. We are doing these things with tools such as territorial integrity and tough regulations that could be further strengthened with the Comprehensive Alcohol Regulatory Effectiveness Act, currently in Congress.

By conjuring up phantom conspiracies, Mr. Brenton has forgotten the three elements that matter most in crafting solid alcohol laws: Michigan citizens, Michigan jobs and Michigan values.



Lansing Photo

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