

OUR VIEW

Striking a balance with home delivery of alcohol

Mix alcohol, businesses, customers, public health and the pandemic and that is one tricky cocktail. The Oregon Liquor Control Commission is smack in the middle, and it's getting some criticism.

Some is warranted. Some is way off the mark.

The OLCC is working on rules to make permanent its temporary rules to make home delivery of alcohol easier. The OLCC can't keep temporary rules forever. It can't extend temporary rules and they expire in September. So it is preparing to make the rules permanent. Permanent rules can always be tweaked and/or revoked in the future.

Here's a key thing to remember: People could get alcoholic beverages delivered to their homes before the pandemic. Not many businesses or customers took advantage of it. The temporary rules made it easier. More varieties of licensees could do it, such as more bars, restaurants and distillers.

Sale of alcohol comes with risk. Alcoholism is a terrible addiction, devastating families and killing people. Underage drinking is also a problem. Home delivery of alcohol creates additional risks. But it also means people don't have to risk more shopping in a store. The rules helped keep businesses open during the pandemic. It helped satisfy consumer demand. Amen to that.

Groups, such as the Oregon Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission and Oregon Recovers, would like the OLCC to, at least, slow down. For instance, the commission suggested in a letter more ways could be found to reduce the risks of home delivery. Well, if the commission has ideas, the OLCC is taking feedback on its proposal. The temporary rules launched in March and April. Where are the ideas?

Oregon Recovers would like to see the OLCC restrict sales, not find ways to support them. It criticized the OLCC's rules advisory committee saying it "purposefully and exclusively limits its deliberations to the best interests of the industry."

Yes, that committee is lopsided. It has more membership from industry representatives than from addiction groups or public health experts. That does not mean the OLCC only listens to or only acts in the best interest of the alcohol industry.

One of the most curious pieces of feedback the OLCC received recently was a letter from a half a dozen Oregon legislators — Reps. Janeen Sollman, Rachel Prusack, Alissa Keny-Guyer, Andrea Salinas and Tawna Sanchez. They are all Democrats.

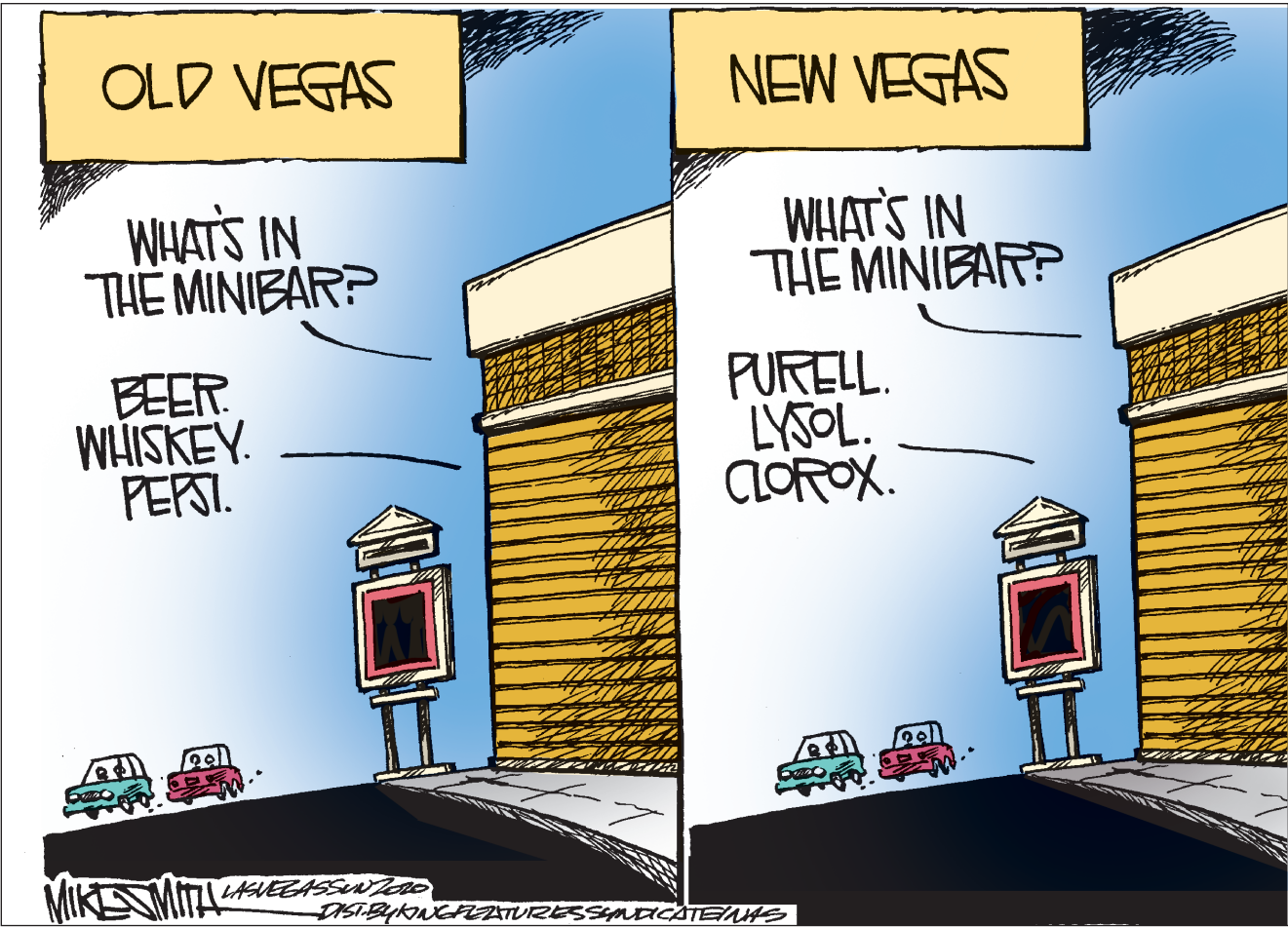
They took the OLCC to task because: "It has come to our attention that you recently sponsored a rare alcohol drawing allowing people the chance to purchase a ticket to win one of several dozen bottles of limited and rare whiskies. We are deeply disappointed that during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic the OLCC would promote hard alcohol consumption."

Sounds bad, huh? Except it doesn't work like that. It is not a chance to purchase a ticket to win. It's a chance to purchase.

Some distillers produce rare, special whiskies and bourbons. How should Oregonians get a chance to get those? The OLCC allows people to enter a lottery to get a chance to purchase. What's wrong with that?

The OLCC plays a precarious balancing act between letting it pour and stoppering it up. The proposal to make the home delivery rules permanent strikes a good balance. But if you have a suggestion about how to make them better, let the OLCC know: olcc.rulemaking@oregon.gov

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Government needs to offer trustworthy COVID-19 data

One of the greatest outrages in the U.S. response to the coronavirus pandemic has been the way the government has failed to offer the people useful, trustworthy information. That's still true, even as President Donald Trump has restarted his daily COVID-19 briefings.

While some outlets have praised his more somber tone, the problem with the previous briefings was not a lack of pessimism and gloom.

The problem was that the president offered almost no usable information about the risks Americans faced, what was being done with our tax dollars to fight back, or an honest evaluation of the various efforts on the part of the pharmaceutical industry.

He has another chance now. But first, he should stop hogging the microphone. The new briefings have featured the president standing alone. What we need is not just more of Anthony Fauci, a bright spot from the earlier briefings, but a combination of other doctors and scientists selected for their work on specific topics — whether that's vaccines, drug development, hospital capacity, epidemiology, virology or economics.

Trump should also provide data that's meant to be useful rather than manipulative. We need a better real-time snapshot of what the virus is doing now.

At an online press conference Tuesday, epidemiologist Caitlin Rivers of the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health said that no states are doing a good job of telling people anything about the

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new positive cases — where they live, what kinds of jobs they have, or how they were likely exposed. There's rarely information about how long it takes to get test results back in different parts of the country, or whether there was any attempt to track down contacts of those who tested positive.

At the same event, former CDC director Tom Frieden noted that COVID-19 is not like AIDS, where people, once infected, remain infectious for life. There's a window of time when people are most infectious — from a couple of days before they get symptoms to five or six days afterwards. If test results take too long, people have already transmitted the virus to most of the people they were ever going to transmit it to.

Too much data now focuses on cumulative cases. The Northeastern states hit hard early in the pandemic often still top the charts or appear dark red on maps even if infection rates there have now plunged.

Rates of change are also not informative on their own. If a state has two cases and one day it doubles to four, that's a fast rate of increase; but it's very different from a place that has 5,000 cases and doubles to 10,000 in the same period of time.

What we really need is some information on the likely number of active cases in our regions — what percentage of the population of a city or county

is likely to be infected or infectious right now? That's the kind of information that should go into decisions such as reopening schools or restaurants, and the kind of "COVID weather report" people need to make their own wise decisions.

Of course, there's more to national leadership than data. These new White House press briefings could bring people together by sharing specific goals — such as making sure no hospital gets overwhelmed, or setting some number of deaths we will try to stay below. The notion of getting the virus "under control" is too vague and too slippery.

Specific, science-based guidelines for good citizenship would help all of us make better choices. They may especially help motivate many younger, healthier people who face a relatively low risk of dying. Some have decided that any personal risk is outweighed by the benefit of human contact or a paycheck or both, but their behavior is helping to keep the pandemic going.

If the president wants to be uplifting and inspiring — or even just get better ratings — what better way than to showcase the country's scientific talent, share useful information people are hungry for, and offer the kind of concrete guidance that has been so sorely lacking?

Faye Flam is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist. She has written for the Economist, the New York Times, the Washington Post, Psychology Today, Science and other publications. She has a degree in geophysics from the California Institute of Technology.

OTHER VIEWS

Reinvigorate Voting Rights Act

Editorial from The Los Angeles Times:

Republicans in Congress, including Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, effusively eulogized Democratic Rep. John Lewis of Georgia after the civil rights legend died last week. McConnell, R-Ky., rightly described Lewis as an "American hero" who "put his life on the line to fight racism, promote equal rights and bring our nation into greater alignment with its founding principles."

Now Senate Democrats are pressing McConnell to match actions to his words by calling up a long-stalled bill to reestablish protections for voting rights that were eviscerated by a 2013 Supreme Court decision. Referring to McConnell, Sen. Kamala Harris said: "If he wants to make clear his honor for the life, the legacy, the sacrifice, the heroism of John Lewis, put that on the floor for a vote, and let's name it the John Lewis Voting Rights Act of 2020."

This isn't just partisan point-scoring. Securing the right to vote for African Americans and other victims of dis-

crimination was the cause of Lewis' life, the cause for which he was marching in Selma, Alabama, in 1965 when he was brutally attacked by police. But it's also vital to American democracy.

The landmark Voting Rights Act of 1965 required, among other things, that states with a history of discrimination "pre-clear" changes in election procedures with the U.S. attorney general or a federal court in Washington, D.C. But seven years ago, in Shelby County v. Holder, the conservative majority of the Supreme Court struck down a formula that determined which jurisdictions were subject to pre-clearance. It was a disastrous ruling that made it easier for states to take steps, such as requiring photo IDs and eliminating polling places, that made it harder to vote.

In his majority opinion, Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. noted that "things have changed dramatically" in the South and other jurisdictions covered by pre-clearance. Yet, he said, the Voting Rights Act continued to rely on "decades-old data and eradicated prac-

tices" in determining which jurisdictions would be subject to pre-clearance.

The court was wrong and reckless in second-guessing the judgment of Congress, which is entrusted by the Constitution with enforcing the 15th Amendment prohibiting racial discrimination in voting. Still, Roberts made it clear that Congress could restore the pre-clearance mandate by establishing a new formula based on more recent data.

That is what would be accomplished at long last by the Voting Rights Advancement Act, which would require pre-clearance in states with numerous voting rights violations over the last 25 years. (Attempts by any jurisdiction to require more proof of identity from would-be voters than the federal government requires could also face a pre-clearance requirement.) The bill was passed by the House in December, but a similar proposal has languished in the Senate. If McConnell and his Republican colleagues want to honor Lewis, and cement his legacy, they will stop their stalling.