

EDITORIALS

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# Bars open until 4 a.m.? Why not?



Drinks are served at Hook & Ladder on S Street in midtown Sacramento. **José Luis Villegas** - Sacramento Bee file

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD

As pressing problems go in California, how late one can grab a drink at a bar doesn't exactly top our list of priorities. But that doesn't mean the state's one-size-fits-all approach to late-night carousing isn't cramping the style of cities that want to capitalize on their nightlife.

Glitzy bars and nightclubs of Los Angeles and San Francisco? The alcohol has to be gone by 2 a.m. Just like in the smaller cities of Woodland, Calistoga and, yes, Sacramento. It has been this way since Prohibition ended in the 1930s.

Meanwhile, in New York City, patrons can drink until 4 a.m. In Chicago, as late as 5 a.m. on Saturdays. In Washington, D.C., until 3 a.m., and until 4 a.m. on weekends in Atlanta. Even in the state of Indiana, a bastion of irrational blue laws, bars close at 3:30 a.m. every night of the week.

California clearly isn't keeping up with its anything-goes reputation.

To fix that, Sen. Scott Wiener, D-San Francisco, is pushing [legislation that could let bars across the state stay open as late as 4 a.m.](#), though it would be up to local governments to make that call. The bill, SB 384, is identical to a bill former Sen. Mark Leno introduced in 2013.

Then as now, the reaction has been swift. Opponents include the [California Alcohol Policy Alliance](#), argues the bill will lead to higher rates of alcohol-related deaths and illnesses. The law enforcements groups that scuttled Leno's bill once again are concerned about an increase in drunken driving.

These issues are real and sobering and shouldn't be ignored by the Legislature. But the pushback over SB 384 shouldn't cloud the purpose of the bill, which is to give local communities [the option of extending the drinking hours at some local establishments](#). The bill isn't a mandate to do so.

“When people hear about this bill, they assume every neighborhood bar in every community across California is going to stay open until 4 a.m.,” Wiener told a member of The Sacramento Bee's editorial board. “This bill is about local control.”

In towns where residents think SB 384 is the worst idea ever and where peace and quiet are prized, elected officials could choose to maintain earlier closing times. Nothing would change.

But officials in San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego and other cities itching to make more money off tourists could choose to let patrons drink a few hours longer. That could be a citywide decision or one affecting bars in certain neighborhoods or blocks.

In Sacramento, the discussion would probably center on midtown, where people clog the sidewalks every weekend as the bars let out.

No matter what, cities would have to work with the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control to come up with safety plans for communities that want to extend drinking hours to 4 a.m. Those kinds of checks and balances are the only way to ensure that all of us in California won't have a collective hangover if SB 384 passes.