

Viewpoint: Reforms can grow beer sector, jobs

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Written by

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Michigan craft beers deservedly are making a name for themselves at home and around the world.

Today, Michigan ranks fifth in number of breweries with sales growing at double-digit rates that far eclipse the national average for craft beer growth in other states. Michigan-made beers are the toast in specialty magazines, in international publications, and at global festivals. Our state is home to more than 140 breweries today; it barely had a handful in the 1990s. These terrific beers are getting into new markets on the strength of our products and a distribution network that employs more than 5,000 people who wake up every morning dedicated to delivering beer to every corner of the state.

Contributing to our success is a balanced system of alcohol regulations and safeguards that are responsible even as they promote economic growth. As the craft beer industry in Michigan grew, we encountered changes in the industry and the marketplace that nobody could foresee decades ago when our regulations were first put in place.

Now, the Legislature has an opportunity to help Michigan's brewers grow even more. Reforms will support an industry that already employs thousands of people by creating new opportunities for economic growth without eroding Michigan's balanced alcohol regulations.

A bipartisan package of 10 bills in the House and Senate can benefit all businesses involved in beer and, more broadly, in the hospitality and tourism sectors. These proposals will ensure Michigan businesses can compete on a fair and level playing field and expand access to new markets.

To help small start-up brewers, the reforms allow them to deliver their beers directly to retailers.

By redefining Michigan microbrewers and brew pubs, these reforms will help successful higher-volume producers grow their businesses, expand their operations and create more jobs.

To help local businesses that play by the rules, the proposals speed up the licensing process and eliminate red tape.

To improve efficiency, the

proposals streamline the way revenue is collected.

To address concerns among bars and restaurants that have long wanted to buy glassware with logos, the proposals now will allow them to purchase these items from independent third parties.

It is exciting that thoughtful collaboration can lead to innovative reforms that significantly advance how Michigan regulates alcohol, without sacrificing the basic foundation that has helped law enforcement and public health groups continue their work to promote moderation and rein in over-zealous promotion.

These reforms are the result of a year of cooperation, consultation and collaboration among many groups: craft brewers, independent retailers, distributors, policymakers and others. Together, we embraced recommendations in Gov. Rick Snyder's report to update alcohol regulations. We met with law enforcement leaders and public health advocates to ensure our proposals honor our commitment to public health and safety.

Good reforms, like good beer, shouldn't be left to sit around. That's why Michigan's craft brewers, distributors and our partners in the beer sector and beyond urge Michigan's Legislature to act swiftly, pass these reforms and keep Michigan the undisputed Great Beer State.

http://www.lansingstatejournal.com/article/20131202/OPINION02/312020055/Scott-Graham-Reforms-can-grow-beer-sector-jobs?nclick_check=1