



June 2019 Newsletter

Public Support for State-based Alcohol Regulation is Very High By Pamela Erickson

As far as the public is concerned our state-based system of alcohol regulation is on solid ground. This is the overall finding of a poll conducted by the Center for Alcohol Policy (CAP). This continued strong support is crucial for retaining critical policies and for funding prevention, enforcement and administration of regulatory agencies.

This poll has been done several times since 2008 and has always shown high support for alcohol policy. This is despite substantial media accounts about how our system is "antiquated" or that alcohol should be sold in interstate commerce just like any other commodity. All those working in the prevention, enforcement or regulatory fields should take heart from these findings. The public is with you!

"...public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail. Without it, nothing can succeed."

President Abraham Lincoln

So, what are the key messages that should be conveyed to both leaders and others in the field?

1. Public support for the "right of individual states to set their own laws and regulations" about alcohol is not only strong, but increasingly so. In 2008, 70% agreed with that statement and in 2019, 83% said they agreed-- a 13% increase.

2. A new question was asked about requiring those licensed to sell or distribute alcohol to be a state resident. **Seventy six percent support that idea.** Residency laws have been severely criticized by those who seek deregulation. However, these laws are based on real-life experiences, before Prohibition, with a "Tied

House" system and absentee owners. Because local markets were dominated by out of state companies, they only cared about profits. The social problems resulting from excessive drinking were ignored.

And, thanks to philosopher George Santayana, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

3. The public continues its strong support for

"The 'tied house' system had all the vices of absentee ownership. The manufacturer knew nothing and cared nothing about the community. All he wanted was increased sales. He saw none of the abuses, and as a non-resident he was beyond local social influence."

Fosdick and Scott, Toward Liquor Control.

considering public safety first before economic development/consumer benefit measures when crafting alcohol regulations. These are the top four considerations that respondents say should be considered for alcohol regulation:

- 78% Reducing drunk driving
- 70% Protecting health and public safety
- 64% Reducing underage drinking
- 57% Encouraging moderation

Further down the ranking were such considerations as creating more jobs (52%), increasing economic development (48%), giving consumers more choices (36%), lowering prices for alcohol (25%), or allowing more businesses to produce and sell alcoholic products (22%).

4. The public continues to be very satisfied with the current system for purchasing alcohol (82%); three-quarters said they support the three-tiered system and believe that it is working well. They

also seem happy about the selection of products (87%), number of places to buy such products (70% said it was about right). They believe our products are safe (87%).

5. While driving under the influence of alcohol remained the top problem, the public is also concerned about drug abuse. Illegal drug abuse, prescription drug abuse and driving under the influence of drugs were rated as "extremely serious" by a majority of respondents.

6. While the public is highly concerned with drunk driving, they do not seem ready to lower the .08 BAC legal limit to operate a motor vehicle. Support for .08 remained the choice of the majority (64%) although there was slightly more support for .05 compared to previous years.

7. While we sometimes hear cries to lower the 21-age limit to buy alcohol, the public is highly supportive of this law...85%...so it's not likely to change any time soon.

8. A sizeable portion of the public has had negative experiences with alcohol...which may partially account for the strong support for alcohol regulation. A quarter of the respondents said they or their family had experienced a "personal tragedy" resulting from alcohol abuse. This is an improvement over the surveys conducted in 2008 and 2110 where 36% said they experienced such a tragedy. However, the Gallup organization has polled the public on alcohol issues since 1947; and they have asked whether drinking has ever been a cause of trouble in a respondent's family. In 1974 only 12% said yes, but since 1999, that figure has been between 30-37%. While there is a big difference between "a personal tragedy" and "a cause of trouble", these results indicate a lot of direct harm.

9. Alcohol regulation does not appear to be much of a partisan issue. According to the CAP website, "85 percent of Republicans, 81 percent of Democrats and 83 percent of Independents express support for alcohol being regulated at the state level."

Toward Liquor Control, Raymond Fosdick and Albert L. Scott, originally published in 1933, republished by the Center for Alcohol Policy, 2011

Quote from President Lincoln,
<https://online.hillsdale.edu/document.doc?id=459>

Sources:

<https://www.centerforalcoholpolicy.org/>

This website has news releases and information about reports available for reading and download.