



4 a.m. Last Call Proposal Actually Has a Shot

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By Dennis Romero



A cocktail at Cole's

Colin Young-Wolff/L.A. Weekly

Los Angeles is truly a global metropolis, and its celebrity-infused nightlife is renowned. But one thing that isn't world class — in fact it's somewhat of an embarrassment when friends arrive from more cosmopolitan climes — is the state's 2 a.m. last call for alcoholic beverages. While big cities across the globe are just hitting peak party time at 2, L.A. is mostly shutting down for the night. It's almost provincial.

A proposal by Sen. Scott Wiener of San Francisco would allow local governments, like L.A. City Hall, to extend those last-call hours to a more metropolitan 4 a.m. It doesn't require the change. In fact, it would even allow cities to create 4 a.m. closing times on certain days, like Fridays and Saturdays, or on holidays like the 4th of July. Similar bills have failed in the shark-infested waters of legislative committees, where lobbyist influences are more murky. But Wiener's bill has actually survived the process and will head next to a full vote of the state Senate.

It's the most successful attempt at extending the Golden State's serving hours since the days of prohibition. The Senate has until June 2 to make a move. The legislation, called the [Let Our Communities Adjust Late Night Act](#), would also need the blessing of the Assembly and the governor. There are still obstacles.

Organizations like Alcohol Justice and the California Alcohol Policy Alliance (CAPA) are opposed, and the powerful group MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) [isn't exactly enthused](#), arguing that a lack of uniform closing times would increase inebriated motoring.

Michael Scippa, director of public affairs for Alcohol Justice, said in a statement that the legislation would "produce more profits for bar, restaurant and nightclub owners, as well as alcohol producers and distributors," but that it would do so "while increasing alcohol-related harms and cost at public expense."

[Richard Zaldivar](#), executive director of the nonprofit [Wall Las Memorias Project](#) in Los Angeles, argues that alcohol establishments disproportionately affect communities of color in L.A. County and that adding two hours to bar businesses could wreak havoc. "It's about big money pushing legislation through at who's expense," he says.

"Some of these low-income communities have liquor-licensed establishments every three blocks or so," Zaldivar says. "We're giving them more time to create more harm to our communities."

Proponents have argued that spreading out closing times is safer than dumping a bunch of drunks on the streets at the same time. And there is more money to be made. The bill is supported by the California Restaurant Association and the California Music & Culture Association, which say extra hours will bring extra tax dollars to the state. The state's restaurant, venue, and entertainment industry is worth a whopping \$50 billion in annual revenues, according to Wiener's office. He said in a statement earlier this year his proposal would allow places like Los Angeles to "benefit economically and culturally from a strong nightlife presence. This week he added in a statement that the bill would grow "nightlife culture and businesses in our cities."

Sharokina Shams, vice president of marketing and communications for the restaurant association, said via email that the bill "would go a long way toward allowing cities to decide what's best for each of them on the question of nighttime bar hours."

In 2013, then-Sen. Mark Leno proposed a blanket 4 a.m. closing time for California. His bill was defeated in committee.

Dennis Romero has worked on staff at several magazines and newspapers, including the Philadelphia Inquirer and the Los Angeles Times, where he participated in Pulitzer Prize-winning coverage of the L.A. riots. His work has appeared in Rolling Stone online, the Guardian, and, as a young stringer, the New York Times.