

EXCLUSIVE: Tavern League Opposes Extended Bar Hours In Milwaukee During DNC
By Mark Belling, WISN-AM

Legislation pushed by the Wisconsin Restaurant Association and Milwaukee officials to allow local bars to stay open and serve alcohol beyond the normal 2 am closing time during July's Democratic National Convention is stalled in the state legislature. I have learned that the influential Tavern League of Wisconsin is opposing the bill and its opposition is the reason for the failure to move on the proposal.

Arguing that the convention presents an opportunity for a windfall for bar and hotel operators, supporters want the closing hours extended during the week of the convention. They have argued that since the convention runs until 10 pm each night, the attendees will want to stay out later than the normal bar closing time. The closing hours affect not only stand-alone bars but those in hotels and private banquet rooms at hotels. Tavern League officials have not responded to my questions about why they are opposing the bill but a very good guess is that they may be looking for concessions on another issue.

The Tavern League represents bar owners around the entire state. Only a tiny fraction of the membership would benefit from closing hours for one week in downtown Milwaukee.

I have argued the legislation should be defeated because it gives special preference to one group. Bar hours have not been extended for other major events in the area or state, include the Harley reunions or major holidays like Halloween or St. Patrick's Day. The only day of the year in which bars are allowed to stay open beyond normal hours is New Year's Eve. Bar time is uniform in Wisconsin: 2 am on weekdays and 2:30 am on weekends.)

The Tavern League has considerable influence in the legislature although the same is true of the Restaurant Association, which supports the bill.

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