

DISCUSSION OF WET-DRY ELECTION IN RUSK STIMULATES PASSIONATE DIALOGUE

Rusk is not quite a tourist Mecca

LYNN WARD
Rusk

Those advocating modifying local liquor laws believe the perceived stagnation of the local economy is directly related to the absence of alcohol at local eateries and the absence of package stores.

As the advocates of the election see things, Americans sitting around their dinner tables planning their summer vacations are routinely deleting Rusk as a potential destination because alcoholic beverages are unavailable. The clear implication being that tourism would dramatically increase if people could just buy liquor in Rusk.

This logic requires the assumption that Rusk is a tourist Mecca. Other than the Texas State Railroad, Rusk does not have a lot to offer the touring public. Would more families, church groups, and senior citizens groups come to Rusk to ride the train if they could buy alcohol locally? Are we being asked to believe that people, locals or visitors, drive to Nacogdoches or Palestine to eat because alcohol is not available in Rusk?

Other advocates of the election see Rusk ceasing to exist if liquor is kept out of the community. Again, the public is asked to assume that people looking to capitalize on the tranquility and slower pace of a small town in which to raise their families would choose another town over Rusk based on this one issue. One must assume that good jobs; improved infrastructure, and desirable leisure activities would flow directly from this one change in the local environment. How plausible is it that the sale of alcohol will determine the fate of any community?

Most Americans, including this writer, occasionally enjoy a glass of wine or a bottle of beer. This said, most families do not make major life choices, such as where we want to raise our families on an issue like the availability of alcoholic beverages. If the sale of liquor is the deciding criteria in families' decisions, one must wonder if Rusk would be worse off if that family chose another town.

While some are required to

shop in bulk when they go to other communities to restock their supply of beer and liquor, one must wonder if they are making a special trip, or did the normal activities of life result in them coming into proximity to a liquor store? Yes, gas is expensive and none of us need the added burden of being forced to shop out of the local community. That being true, would Rusk be better off with a larger grocery store, or perhaps an additional store to spur competition, or simply the ability to buy beer at Brookshire's?

Is the absence of alcoholic beverages in Rusk the most pressing issue the councilman could find to address?

The very essence of leadership is "follow me." If the councilman believes that alcohol sales are that important, he should make the proposal before the council and stake his political future on the outcome. The public has a legitimate right to decide this issue. There is no need to make this a referendum on the future of the community.

90 percent of crimes involve drugs, alcohol

KENNETH WHITE
Rusk

Some find fault with Rusk because we are a dry community and suggest "we need to join the 21st century."

The argument was made that alcohol would draw more tourists here and the increased tax revenue would benefit the city.

If you go to the FBI page on crime statistics you will read that there are an average of 20,000 people killed in America every year from drunk driving. That doesn't include the hundreds of thousands of those injured in auto accidents. There have been more people killed in America from drunk driving than from all the combined war deaths we have suffered as a nation in our history. How many homes are broken up from alcohol in the home? I know it is in the millions nationwide. I worked for the Texas prison system from 1984-1993 and the information we received on crime statistics was that 90 percent of all crimes committed in Texas involved alcohol or drugs or both. There are those who say they know

when to say enough after they've drunk a few beers but most of them don't know what they're talking about. I believe legally drunk means your alcohol content in your blood is .08 tenths measured by a breathalyzer or blood test. A man about 5 ft. 8 inches tall and weighs about 140 pounds and drinks a couple of beers may have enough alcohol in his blood to make him legally drunk. I don't want to go into stores in Rusk and see alcoholic beverages in the cooler and on the shelves. I moved from Houston 30 years ago to this area because it is a good place to raise your family and it was dry. I've seen too much of what alcohol can do to people and to a community. I've stood in line in convenience stores here and saw clerks sell underage teenagers cigarettes without checking ID. I believe the same thing would happen with alcohol sales to minors. If you notice some of the alcohol commercials on TV you always see a glamorous picture of young people drink-

ing it up and having a good time. They will never show you the scenes of dead people at an accident scene caused by drunk driving. There are a few ministers in this community who won't speak out against alcohol and call it what it is because they may lose half their congregations. Whatever happened to the preaching of Billy Sunday? Billy, where are you when we need you? What these people need who have this craving for alcohol is salvation. Alcohol companies run these slick commercials about knowing when you've had enough to drink. If that were to happen as they picture it in their commercials then they would go broke. That day is coming, however. There is a day coming worldwide when the curse of alcohol will be removed from the earth. God has a Kingdom coming which will remove the curse put on mankind by the fall of Adam and we will be rid of this stuff forever. I look forward to that day. May Jesus soon remove this blight off of our Land.

Is it really worth the money?

ROBIN PARSONS
Gallatin

I don't question the economic boom that would follow alcohol sales. But along with those benefits would also come problems.

More local drunk drivers on our city streets, more availability to young people, more beer signs, more fights as these big spenders are out of control while under the influence. Then there would need to be more officers to write the tickets and deal with drunks, more jail space, which requires more jailers, more nurses and doctors to provide for the care of these who are injured while driving or fighting.

Littering that would increase, requiring more city workers, attorneys to handle the legal aspects of all the citations and lawsuits.

Society is suffering because of the desire to have more inviting places for people to drink. Our little town is known for a lot of things and one of them is not a place to come

and drink. I am all for growth, just not through destructive ways.

Young people are looking to us to set the standard which they likely will follow. If we present drinking as positive, then we willingly, maybe unintentionally, also say that social drugs and social sex are okay.

When will we as a society, as a parent start caring more about the future of our town, our county and our country? When will we deny ourselves those destructive pleasures and then spend that money (that we would have spent on alcohol) on our families and children?

There is a more honorable way to grow a town. If alcohol sales are going to be our crutch to growth, then rest assured, eventually we will need a crutch to survive the affects. And what will it be then?

My vote is to put our efforts into seeking a way to maintain the testimony of our little town

while seeking other avenues of positive growth.

Show me anything positive about alcohol. Is it the destroyed families, the incarcerated mothers and fathers and eventually the children? Is it the death from car accidents? Is it the yards full of beer bottles and cans? Is it the hospital rooms full of distraught families? Is it the people who don't show for work the next day? Is it the influx of those who will be drinking and on the road when your wife, husband or child is driving in the oncoming lane of traffic? Or maybe it's the decline of morals, our empty church pews or the lack of money to pay the bills? Ask those who have lost all that was important in life.

Jacksonville is growing nicely without alcohol sales.

Many will laugh and ridicule my views, but come back and read this letter in 20 years and ask again, was it really worth the money?

What would Jesus do?

JAYANNA MAGRUDER
Rusk

When I first read the "wet-dry election" article, my heart sank. I have always viewed Rusk and the surrounding area as a very safe, predominantly Christian community. When I went off to Houston for college, I quickly came to realize how blessed I was to have grown up in Cherokee County. We truly have a great group of churches and some outstanding citizens that call Rusk home.

To hear that our beautiful town may soon be packed with liquor, beer, and wine is devastating. Where are our morals? I would bet that close to 85 percent of the people of Rusk call themselves Christians. Where are we? As Christians we are supposed to be different than the rest of the world, for the Bible commands us "to be in the world, but not of the world." Although I've only been alive for 19 years, I have seen America transform drastically since I was a child. The things on television, the news, and in our school systems frighten me. These are truly the end times, and now is the time for Christians to wake up, unite, and inflict a positive change in our society. America has forced God out of our schools and government, and as a result, this great nation is falling apart. God gave us a free will, and when we choose not to follow him, he has to remove his hand from us. Christians, I ask you to take a moment and focus on where the world is headed, the direction that the United States of America is going, and where the future of Rusk lies.

This "wet-dry" decision is a big deal, for it will have long lasting effects that go far beyond the gain of money. People used to wear bracelets

that boldly stated the letters "WWJD?" meaning "What would Jesus do?" So, I ask you, what would He do in this situation? I bet you all know the answer. And I also bet that if Jesus Christ physically stood beside us at the voting poll, none of us would vote in favor of a wet county.

Also, we all know that people don't usually drink in moderation. If they did then America certainly wouldn't be faced with over 500,000 alcohol related car accidents each year! Let me clarify, however, that this is really not about whether or not our town/county would drink in moderation or not.

But instead, this debate is about morals, about standing up for righteousness, about standing up for God. What kind of example are we setting for our children if we all vote in favor of alcohol being available in our town? What kind of message are we sending, as Christians, to our community if we allow this change? In my opinion, it's the idea that money is greater and more important than morality and our right standing with God. The Bible clearly states in 1 Timothy 6:10, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith..." (NIV). Obviously our town is considering this idea for financial reasons. I am a strong supporter of bringing Rusk business. My family has owned and operated a successful business for over 50 years, and I want to see this town flourish. But am I willing to lay aside my beliefs in order to gain more tourists, money, etc.? Of course not!

I sincerely believe that if we oppose this idea, God will recognize our obedience

and prosper us in return. He has already promised us in 2 Chronicles 7:14 that "if my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." Whatever happened to us going to the Lord in our time of need? Whatever happened to us calling upon Him? He hasn't changed; he is the one thing that is constant, n e v e r - changing, eternal. We have changed. We have sat back (by not voting, petitioning, praying) and watched things that were once considered horrible and offensive, become a part of everyday life and accepted within the government system. We have stayed quiet thinking that these decisions would not affect us-but they did, and now we are paying the price.

As Christians we have a duty, a duty to uphold the Kingdom of God in our world as best as we know how. With this possible "wet-dry election" in the near future, I urge you to realize the seriousness of this matter, and think about the consequences a bad decision is inevitable to bring. The father of this nation, George Washington, once said, "it is impossible to rightly govern a nation without God and the Bible." Today this statement applies more than ever; it is up to you and me to invoke changes, while standing against negative ones. Consider these thoughts as you prepare to vote.

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Rusk is a good place to live, raise families

JOHNNIE MCKAY
Rusk

Small towns want their economies to grow. I guess the question is at what cost? Several seem to think voting in alcohol would go a long way toward solving the economic problem. One went so far as to suggest that our City spends nearly \$1 million going out of town to buy alcohol. I didn't realize we have that many "drinkers" with that much money. Maybe our economy is not so bad after all.

Anyway there are a few downsides to the picture. Of course, some haven't been around 80 plus years to see some of the alcohol-related problems, especially where

alcohol is easily obtainable. I have seen relatives, friends and many families destroyed by alcohol. A close friend was killed by a drunk driver.

By lowering inhibitions, alcohol has caused young people numerous other problems such as gangs, stealing, fighting, drug use, sexual abuse, and even murders.

My pastor is a chaplain at one of state prison units. He tells me the that their figures show that 80-85 percent of the prisoners are there because of alcohol or drug abuse.

One prisoner told him that when his daddy died, they tried to get him to go to the funeral.

To make a long story short, the prisoner said he didn't want to go. He said, "My daddy never took me fishing, or to a ball game. The only time I ever saw him was when he came in drunk and beat my mama and us kids."

Not all drinkers are drunkards. But making alcohol easily available can lead to alcoholism. Several friends ended up in the state hospital to "dry out" or receive treatment.

God has been good to Rusk by giving it some good industries and making it a good place to live and raise families. He might Bless us further if we keep up the good work.

JINKINS

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lots usually have several customers. One would think that with that many stores doing that much business that the city coffers would be full of tax money.

Was there economic boom in Cuney? The answer is no.

A few years after the town had voted wet, the city council petitioned county commissioners to mow their streets because they could not afford to do so themselves. None of the plans for city growth panned out.

If you drive through Cuney today, the only buildings there today that were not there before the vote to go wet are the package stores and the city hall.

If the City of Rusk wants tax revenue it should attract legitimate businesses. It has only been a few months since I tried to move one of my businesses into town and was crucified in this forum for my trouble.

If my business had been inside the

city last year, the City of Rusk would have benefited by approximately \$20,000 in tax revenue.

Another of our local citizens wanted to put his business in Rusk and eventually employed over 20 workers. All he asked of the city was to run city utilities to his business. The city refused and he located his business elsewhere.

There is always talk of this business or that business coming to Rusk and it never seems to pan out. There has to be some reason. I know, that in the case of my business, no one wanted it near their property.

One resident suggested that I put the business in Jacksonville because Jacksonville is already "messed up" with businesses. I proposed to put the business right on U.S. Highway 69 in a business area. For some reason, the zoning divided the property between business and residential and the outcry was so great that I could not get it changed.

As a consequence, I have put the business just outside the city limits. What will happen to the +/- \$20,000.00 in tax revenue? The answer is nothing. With the business located just outside of the city limits, we won't collect city sales taxes. I didn't ask for concessions or abatements.

There are no shortcuts to economic development. You build a city one business at a time. As you add businesses, you add infrastructure. Rusk will not and can not survive on tourism, the state hospital and TDCJ alone. That is what Rusk has been depending on for decades.

I can only speak for the last 50 years. In my opinion, it must have support businesses and retail stores. It must have support businesses and entertainment. A wise Rusk city councilman once told me, "Rusk is a great place to raise your children and a great place to retire, but there is nothing for those in between."

He is absolutely right. My employees live here. They buy their groceries here. They go to church here. Their kids go to school here. That is the kind of businesses Rusk needs to attract.

Rusk may never be a booming metropolis and I'm not sure that I would even want that. I moved my family away for about five years and moved back because Rusk "is" the kind of town you want to raise your children in. Rusk is my hometown. I was raised here. I graduated high school here. My children both graduated high school here. My oldest son has a home here and is raising his family here. My youngest son is at college but still calls Rusk home. My family is not typical.

When I was a senior at RHS, the school paper polled every senior with the same question, "Where do you see yourself in 20 years?" I remember the question and my answer distinctly. My answer was, "As far

away from Rusk as 20 years will get me." My answer was not atypical. In fact it was quite common. It may have been phrased differently but the thought was the same. That thought is; there is nothing in Rusk to hold me here. In the years since I answered that question, I have come to realize that this concept has been going on for quite some time. You graduate. You move off to make your living and you move back to retire. Let's do something to break that cycle. Let's keep our best and brightest. Let's provide opportunities for them to thrive at home, not Houston or Dallas.

If the citizens want to have a wet-dry election, let's go into that with our eyes open. There will be no economic boon from liquor sales. Let's take a lesson from history, for once. Look no further than Cuney or Berryville.

Is this the prosperity we want? I, for one, think not.