

McKinley County passes resolution supporting the restriction of alcohol sales

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun CorrespondentBy Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
Friday, 24 February 2017 04:21



HB162 and SB 124 winding through state legislative committees

The McKinley County Board of Commissioners approved a resolution Feb. 7 related to the support of two bills making their way through the New Mexico Legislature. The bills, HB 162 and SB 124, deal with liquor control and contain provisions for certain local option districts to restrict the hours of the sale of alcoholic beverages.

Commissioner Bill Lee abstained on the vote and its prior discussion. The matter was introduced by McKinley County Attorney Doug Decker and Gallup City Manager Maryann Ustick, who asked commissioners to support the resolution.

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“We’re asking for an OK to this resolution,” Ustick said. “This is about the restructuring of the sales of alcoholic beverages.”

Both Ustick and Decker noted that alcohol sales impact the quantity of exposure deaths in Gallup year-round. The passage of such a bill reduces the supply – at least as far as it concerns the hours that alcohol is sold, the two said.

If passed, a final bill would not permit alcohol to be sold before 11 am. At the moment, retailers start selling alcohol at 7 am. Gallup and McKinley County are consistently at the top of the list statewide when it comes to DWI and alcohol arrests, officials have said.

Ustick said at least one of the bills has encountered some opposition, but a newly tailored bill could end with the selling hour starting at 10 am, she said. That’s due to the fact that opponents argue the passing of such a bill carries the potential of harming business bottom lines, Decker suggested.

“There are various arguments used that are counter to this proposal,” Decker said. “One is from the standpoint of you can’t tell businesses what to do. What this is probably coming around to is a compromise on both sides.”

Commissioner Carol Bowman-Muskett said she thought the county and the city were already doing what the bills call for. “I thought we were doing this already,” Bowman-Muskett said. “By the same token, those people who are alcoholics and drinkers will find a way to get it (alcohol) no matter what time of the day or night.”

Ustick said the bills, for the most part, pertain to the sale of packaged liquor and not alcoholic drinks served in establishments, like restaurants. It is a common thing in Gallup and McKinley County to see intoxicated people buying beer and wine and liquor at 7 am.

McKinley County police officials were all for the Board of Commissioners supporting the bills.

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“Anything we can do is a plus,” McKinley County Sherriff Ron Silversmith said. “They’re going to find a way to get the alcohol. The only thing we can do is make it a little harder for them.”

Both Ustick and Decker said an amendment to the bill was necessary in order for the entire measure to make it to the floors of the House of Representatives and Senate.

Sen. George Muñoz, a co-sponsor of SB 124, said he’s optimistic that a stripped down bill will ultimately end up on the desk of Gov. Susana Martinez.

“We’re really past the beginning part of the process,” Muñoz said. “I think everyone in McKinley County has their eyes on this.”

Lee is the executive director of the Gallup-McKinley County Chamber of Commerce which was the reason behind the abstention on supporting the resolution, he said.

***By Bernie Dotson
Sun Correspondent***