

Let restaurants sell alcohol to go

Donald Trump predicts the economy will recover soon, but I see things differently. In my opinion, until there is a treatment, a vaccination, or a very low infection rate, the economy will be sluggish at best. The unemployment rates will probably exceed those we saw after the 2008 financial crisis. The industries that require people to mingle in close proximity will suffer as long as the virus poses a threat to their customers.

One industry in particular, restaurants, have lost a lot of business during the era of social distancing. While some restaurants offer food to go, their pickup business produces only a fraction of the sales they are used to earning during more normal times. As their sales drop, these restaurants will not need as many workers and will only have enough revenue to support an operation with fewer workers. Consequently, these restaurants will lay off workers. To prevent at least some of these workers from becoming unemployed, a temporary change in the state and county regulations may be in order.

Currently, Faulkner County is a “damp” county, meaning that within the county, one cannot go into a liquor store to buy a case of beer or a few bottles of wine. This does not mean there were no liquor sales before the virus struck. Until recently, in many Conway restaurants, customers could order alcohol with their food orders.

With the onset of the pandemic, the state allowed restaurants with liquor permits to sell sealed bottles and cans of alcohol with the purchase takeout food. This relaxation of the rules was im-

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Faulkner County should allow restaurants that were already allowed to sell alcohol on the premises to sell to go bottles and cans of liquor. Further, the state should allow these sales as long as the virus impacts the restaurant industry.

My proposal has several advantages. First, restaurants will see a significant increase in sales when they can sell alcohol to go. I interviewed a person from a local restaurant and she said her establishment gets numerous phone calls inquiring whether the restaurant sells wine and beer. She also told me that when the potential customers hear that no alcohol is available, they do not make purchases. Conway’s restaurants would get more business if they could sell liquor, which in turn would allow these establishments to keep more employees on the

payroll, lessening the county’s economic hardships.

Second, I heard reports that Pulaski County liquor stores near our border are very busy. These packed establishments present a needless health danger. People are having trouble keeping six feet apart from other patrons when the stores are crowded. By allowing Conway’s restaurants to sell alcohol, these traditional liquor stores will be less crowded as people avail themselves of other options. Because the sales of alcohol will be spread out among so many restaurants in Conway, it will be easy to manage the flow of customers to minimize the chance of spreading the virus.

Third, the extra business from liquor sales will enable more of Conway’s restaurants to weather this economic storm. Some of our restaurants have already shut down for good. It would be a shame if we did not take steps, like the one I am proposing, to keep as many of our restaurants viable as possible during these next few months.

While Conway has a long history of preventing to go liquor sales, we are living through times that call for an exception to be made to this long-standing rule. The exception would save jobs, prevent the spread of the virus, and allow more restaurants to survive these difficult times.

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