

Death and Taxes: The Motivation Behind Selective Reopening

America is slowly beginning to reopen, with different states running the course at varying speeds. While the [Wisconsin Supreme Court recently](#) repealed state-wide regulations instantaneously, most states do not have the benefit of such decisive action, and are instead suffering through phases arbitrarily decided by state and local governments or executive fiat.

In most of America, liquor stores have remained open throughout the duration of the wide variety of “stay at home” orders that have closed down the economy and daily life. While some people have indeed [started to drink less](#), others have begun to drink more, with retail alcohol sales up [somewhere between 25 and 55 percent](#).

With the liquor stores open, the 67 percent of Americans who have [one or more drinks per week](#) are able to make their weekend booze run, watch reruns on ESPN with a cold one, and drink their cares away. Meanwhile the 77 percent of Americans who are adherents of one religion or another are still prevented from attending services in much of the country, or at the least, services [are limited to 10 people](#) or less, no matter the size of the church, synagogue, or mosque.

Minnesota is one state limiting religious gatherings to 10 or fewer people. It seems Gov. Tim Walz and his administration continue to view religious communities as an unessential service.

Minnesota’s casinos however, will be reopening soon, with Mystic Lake planning to [open on May 26th with 50 percent](#) of its

chairs removed to provide social distancing space. Minnesota's [malls and retailers](#) are also now allowed to be open at 50 percent capacity.

Meanwhile, the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis had been hoping to open churches [at just 33 percent of their normal capacities](#).

So why would the government tolerate liquor stores operating without capacity limits during the worst part of the government shut down? Why are casinos allowed to operate at 50 percent capacity, but churches are not allowed to open their doors for a smaller percentage?

In November 1789 – a few months after the U.S. Constitution took effect – Benjamin Franklin [wrote a letter](#) to his friend the French physicist Jean-Baptiste Le Roy. In it, Franklin stated that “Our new Constitution is now established, and has an appearance that promises permanency; but in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.”

Death and taxes will remain certainties in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, yet the guarantees of the Constitution are appearing much less so than they were a few months ago. Will the government continue to put their own monetary gain over the lives and rights of the citizenry? Or will Americans cling more dearly to the rights they have because they now see them threatened?

It seems curious that the state would be eager to protect fictional rights such as the right to drink, the right to gamble, and the right to shop in person – [we've been quite able and willing to shop online](#) during quarantine – while ignoring the real rights of Americans to peaceably assemble and to freely exercise their religious beliefs. Yet it makes perfect sense from a revenue-based perspective.

With regard to casinos, all gambling winnings are subject to Minnesota's income tax, which ranges from 5.35 to 9.85

percent. Minnesota has a statewide sales tax of 6.875 percent, [the sixth highest in the nation](#), which generates quite a bit of revenue. Add [on another 2.5 percent for liquor sales](#). The latter tax alone accounted for more than [\\$191 million of revenue for the state in 2018](#).

Religious organizations, meanwhile, [are exempt from a wide variety of taxes](#) in Minnesota, including sales taxes.

Could it be that when the government delegates services as “essential” or “non-essential” that they aren’t talking about the utility of the service to their constituents? Perhaps instead, the government’s definition of essential is merely found by examining how essential it is to the bottom line of the state’s tax coffers.

Rather than “if it moves, tax it” our governments have adopted a new axiom for the age of COVID-19:

“If we can tax it, we will let it move.”

Correction: The original article listed religious adherents as 78.2 percent of the population. We apologize for the error.

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