



QUOTE OF THE DAY

“I’m really struck by how pragmatic the new Democratic majority appears to be with such a limited agenda.”

– Brookings Institution’s Sarah Binder on House Speaker-to-be Nancy Pelosi’s “First 100 hours” agenda

VIEWPOINTS



People gather to celebrate New Year’s Eve at the newest spot in town, Rocket to Venus, in Hampden. Contributor Tom Moore thinks bar hours should be extended on weekends. – George Hagegeorge/For The Baltimore Examiner

Keep bars open later for safety reasons

By Tom Moore

It is a familiar scene, the one we see outside the bar as it is closing on a Friday or Saturday night, a scene oft repeated in such places as Federal Hill, Canton, Fells Point, Mt. Vernon and Towson, among other go-to locations in the Baltimore area.

It is the crowd of 20-somethings walking out, couples hand-in-hand, girlfriends helping an intoxicated sister out to the car. Then there are the young professionals with their striped shirts and slick jeans, then the sporty guys who come from the club wearing athletic apparel of popular Baltimore and NBA teams.

Then of course, there are the hoodlums from these latter two groups, and sometimes from other groups as well.

The crush of people leaving the bar between 1:30 and 2 a.m. is a major concern for police, bar owners, bouncers, neighborhood residents and passersby on a weekly basis. For whatever reason, a drunk fellow or a hoodlum always says the wrong thing about the wrong woman to the wrong guy and finds himself on the wrong end of a fist. Sometimes it’s the wrong end of the gun, as several shootings outside the in-

famous Club Choices and former establishments Gator’s Pizza and Pub and Redwood Trust have shown in the past.

While authorities must close establishments with a track record of violent episodes, the same can’t be said for the rest of Baltimore bars where a few idiots can’t hold their liquor.

So, to the same bar owners who have criticized my support of a city-wide smoke ban, I propose a different kind of solution: Extend bar hours on weekends until 4 a.m.

The plan makes sense for safety. In New York City, police credit later bar hours as a major reason for fewer assaults and other violent incidents outside establishments. When bars stay open later, people trickle out rather than leave en masse. This means fewer idiots will leave a bar at one time. It also means a lower chance of confrontation outside of Baltimore-area bars.

Also, the human body naturally slows down as the night grows later, so people will leave when they start to feel tired rather than because it’s last call, so bars won’t be packed to capacity at 4 a.m.

Yet bar owners would still have the benefit of the added late business. There will be people who come in late and stay later, and that’s an

extra two hours of business for owners to turn a profit they claim they will lose if the City Council rightly votes for a smoke ban, possibly in February.

In addition to New York, this is a plan that works in Washington. The bars and clubs stay open later in the District on the weekends, bar and club owners make more money and people are safer.

Neighborhood residents might hear more noise in the early mornings on the weekends, but the same people who would hear a little noise at 4 a.m. wouldn’t suffer nearly as much noise at 2 a.m. consistently every weekend.

Maybe residents wouldn’t be woken up at all — at 2 a.m. or 4 a.m. — if bars close later.

City Councilman Jack Young says the idea makes sense. Other members should consider the issue, too and pass a bill to extend bar hours on weekends, making our streets and our people safer, helping out our bar owners in the process and putting us on par with Washington and New York City with a plan that works.

Tom Moore’s talk radio program, “The AES Tom Moore Show” is now on two hours every Saturday night, from 10 p.m. to midnight on AM 680 WCBM. His Web site is: www.tommoorradio.com.

NAT HENTOFF

Putting God in His place

Shortly after school began in September, the teacher told his students at the [public] Kearny High School in New Jersey ... that only Christians had a place in heaven — according to audio recordings made by a student. — “Talk in Class Turns to God,” The New York Times, Dec. 18.

When 16-year-old Matthew LaClair, a junior at Kearny High School, 10 miles west of Manhattan in New Jersey, recorded eight lectures by popular teacher David Paszkiewicz in an accelerated American history course, he started a furor not only in his hometown but elsewhere around this country.

Constitutional law professor Jonathan Turley, a columnist and a litigator in national-security cases, said in an Oct. 18 interview with MSNBC that history will ask this generation of Americans — who “are strangely silent in this national yawn as our rights evaporate” — “Where were you?”

While the First Amendment insists there be no law “prohibiting the free exercise” of religion, it also forbids any law “respecting an establishment of religion.”

Matthew LaClair will be able to answer that question proudly, although at present he is a pariah among many of his fellow students at Kearny High — and on his computer, there are curses from outraged Americans around the country. He has even received a death threat.

How dare he covertly record the religious beliefs of this esteemed person — described by school principal Al Somma as an “excellent teacher. ... As far as I know, there have never been any problems in the past.” After all, doesn’t teacher David Paszkiewicz have the academic freedom, under the First Amendment, to tell his students — as Tina Kelley reported in the Dec. 18 New York Times (and LaClair himself taped) — that the doors of heaven are closed to nonbelievers in Jesus and that a “specific Muslim girl would go to hell”?

Also, this teacher, in addition to his position at the high school, is a youth pastor at Kearny Baptist Church.

Not surprisingly, he told his students at the public, taxpayer-financed Kearny High that “evolution and the Big Bang were not scientific.”

The teacher, after Matthew turned over his recordings to school officials, is no longer religiously proselytizing in class. And Matthew, who tells me he’s lost a lot of friends, adds that he’s “extremely surprised by the hostile opposition” in much of the community.

Matthew did question the teacher’s conclusions in class, but he also felt it necessary to re-

cord those statements. “Because otherwise,” he told me, “nobody was going to believe they’d been made. Even now, students in the class, protecting the teacher, say he didn’t say those things.”

While the school’s principal says there has never before been a problem with this teacher, he is now aware — as bloggers around the world are tuning into this fractious constitutional lesson — that this growing problem goes to the heart of the “Establishment Clause” in the First Amendment.

While the First Amendment insists there be no law “prohibiting the free exercise” of religion, it also forbids any law “respecting an es-

tablishment of religion.” What that means was clearly explained in a New Jersey case,

Everson v. Board of Education (1947), by Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black:

“Neither a state nor the Federal Government can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another. ... No tax, in any amount, large or small” — such as those that fund Kearny High — “can be levied to support any religious activities ... or teach or practice religion.”

And, in speaking of public schools, Justice Felix Frankfurter put it as plainly as possible why Matthew LaClair is so valuably instructing his high school and the nation as he stands up for the Constitution — even as some of his friends forsake him.

And, in speaking of public schools, Justice Felix Frankfurter put it as plainly as possible why Matthew LaClair is so valuably instructing his high school and the nation as he stands up for the Constitution. ...

There must be, said Frankfurter, “strict confinement of the state to instruction other than religious, leaving to the individual’s church and home indoctrination in the faith of his choice.”

Also left to our choice is to have no religious faith at all. The Constitution protects atheists, too.

James Madison said the First Amendment “strongly guarded ... the separation between Religion and Government in the Constitution of the United States.”

If he were still alive, I think Mr. Madison might well be glad to meet Matthew LaClair.

Nat Hentoff writes a weekly column for the Village Voice and writes about music for The Wall Street Journal.