

Iowa: Gassing up, getting liquor just got easier in Iowa

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Gas stations can now sell hard liquor with fewer restrictions under legislation signed into law by Gov. Terry Branstad.

The law allows gas stations to receive Class E liquor licenses, which means they don't have to put up a partition or create a separate entrance for hard liquor stock.

"I'm just hoping that some communities decide that they don't want this in their area," said Sen. Nancy Boettger, R-Harlan, who was one of handful of lawmakers in each chamber to oppose the bill. "More access means more abuse."

Senate members approved the legislation 33-14, while the House voted in favor of it 86-9, before Branstad signed the bill Wednesday.

Rep. Walt Rogers, R-Cedar Falls, said he supported the legislation because "alcohol is a legal product" and he felt that gas stations shouldn't be penalized from selling alcohol because they were gas stations.

The legislation was supported by several lobbying organizations including the Petroleum Marketers and Convenience Stores of Iowa, the Iowa Grocery Association and Kum and Go convenience stores. No lobbyists had registered against the bill.

"I've always voted against that bill every time it comes up," said Rep. Pat Grassley, R-New Hartford. "It's one of those which generates a lot of interest in the district and that's the message they send me year after year."

Sen. Robert Hogg, D-Cedar Rapids, said making the liquor more accessible was the main reason he voted against the measure.

"I think there are a lot of communities that didn't want liquor stores in their area that are going to be surprised when hard liquor starts showing up on the local gas station shelves," he said.