

Guest Columnist

## **Be wary of industry's promises that seem too good to be true**

By Chuck Groover

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Just how far will the folks at Red, White and Food (an organization working to legalize the sale of wine in food stores) go in their attempt to convince you of your need to have high proof alcohol (wine) placed on the shelves of your local food store?

Does truth in advertising even apply to this group? Take a moment to consider the evolution of their argument. First, they sought to promise you the convenience you deserve by having wine sold in your local food market. How much more convenient can it be to buy wine in Tennessee? Tennessee law allows high proof alcohol (wine) to be purchased and delivered right to your front door.

Their next promise is additional income for the state coffers from increased sales generated by having wine placed on the shelves of your local food outlet. Red, White and Food claims \$19 to \$38 million dollars in new revenues for the state could be realized if a law is passed in Nashville allowing wine sales in food stores.

Really, where do they expect all these new customers to come from in the state that reportedly has the lowest percentage of alcohol drinkers in the country? The latest Centers for Disease Control report discloses 74.9 percent of Tennesseans claim not to have consumed even one drink of alcohol within the last 30 days.

Red, White and Food now promises as many as 3,500 new jobs will be created if wine is allowed to be sold in local grocery stores. It is important for you to know this claim is based on a study paid for by the Tennessee Grocers and Convenience Store Association.

In these economic hard times the promise of new jobs to encourage economic growth is very tempting, but this promise is based on factors that no one can predict with certainty.

All this sounds very similar to the promises made a few years ago supporting the passage of the lottery. Remember, every student in Tennessee who wants to go college will be able to go with the assistance of a Hope Scholarship? Whoops! Sorry, another promise made that could not be delivered because of unforeseen issues. Even with record lottery sales the demand for scholarships cannot be met. The promise to create new jobs without any reliable assurance is another shameful act of deception toward the people of Tennessee.

Now RW&F is promising to relieve women across Tennessee of the uncomfortable experience (“women generally find it uncomfortable to shop in conventional liquor stores”) of shopping in a conventional liquor store if wine sales are allowed in your local grocery store. Honestly, it is difficult for me to determine just who all RW&F has insulted with this interesting (irresponsible) comment. According to RW&F’s blog, 50 percent of all wine sold in the United States is purchased by women as they buy groceries for the week. Red White & Food’s stated desire is to reach this huge untapped (women) market in Tennessee, but first they must convince your elected officials in Nashville to pass the bill affording them the opportunity.

Make no mistake about it, the only promise Red White & Food has any interest in is the promise of big profit margins on the sale of wine in their stores. Their tactics smell of greed, debauchery and self-absorbed irresponsibility.

Those behind this push in Tennessee have no concern whatsoever for the well being of Tennesseans. They have no sense of compassion for those fighting the addiction of alcohol who will be forced to shop for the staples of life, while being confronted by their personal demon with every turn they make in the store. They feel no responsibility for the broken homes, shattered lives and stolen futures of those who will

become trapped by addiction as a result of easy accessibility of high proof alcohol.

Those behind this push to allow the sale of wine in your local grocery store will soon sit in their corporate headquarters, located out of state, counting their big profits. Meanwhile we in Tennessee will be left to count the cost in human lives and broken dreams. This is in our future — unless Tennessee Baptists refuse to stand by silently once again and allow the high paid lobbyist to wine and dine our elected officials, convincing them that it does not matter if they pass this law because Baptists do not care.

One leader in the House of Representatives has been overheard to say he would vote for this bill unless he heard from the two largest Baptist churches in his district. Where are our churches? Where are our pastors? Where are the WMU ladies? Where is our compassion? Where is our love for our neighbor?

Brothers and sisters, this law is going to pass if we do not make a united effort to let those we sent to Nashville know we do not support this law. I cannot stress how critical it is for each of us to contact our elected officials and let them hear from us. I promise you, this is another promise from the world that is too good to be true.

— *Groover is senior pastor of Victory Baptist Church, Mount Juliet.*