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# Utah's 'Zion Curtain' Falls And Loosens State's Tight Liquor Laws

July 2, 2017 · 12:15 PM ET



AMY HELD



Utah restaurant owner Joel LaSalle smashes a partition known as a "Zion Curtain" that prevented customers from seeing alcoholic drinks being mixed and poured. On Saturday, a new rule allowed some restaurants to tear down this wall.

*Rick Bowmer/AP*

The sound of breaking glass reverberated through Utah on Saturday as the state's so-called Zion Curtain liquor law came crashing down.

H.B. 442, a sweeping piece of alcohol reform legislation the Utah State Legislature

passed in March, means some restaurants can take down the partitions meant to block the view of alcoholic drinks being mixed and poured.

The goal of the original rule was to shield kids from the supposed glamour of bartending and subsequent risks of underage drinking, reports The Associated Press.

"It feels fabulous and liberating. It's a hallelujah moment," Joel LaSalle, owner of Current Fish & Oyster told the AP as his glass wall smashed into smithereens.



Salt Lake City restaurant owner Joel LaSalle sits in front of a once-mandatory partition that prevented customers from seeing their alcoholic drinks being mixed and poured. New state legislation meant he could remove the partition on Saturday.

*Rick Bowmer/AP*

"Over the last two years, it probably cost us \$350,000 in sales," LaSalle told Nicole Nixon from member station KUER in Salt Lake City. LaSalle said people didn't want to sit at the bar and face a frosted glass wall instead of a bartender.

Opponents of the old law said it punished new restaurants, since those built before 2009 were not required to have the barrier and even with one kids could see alcoholic drinks being consumed anyway, reports AP.

But Utah Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control Spokesman Terry Wood told *The Salt Lake Tribune* that restaurants must first be inspected and approved before the barriers can come down. If restaurants take down this wall without approval they could be hit with fines or loss of a liquor license.

"Liquor laws in Utah are notoriously burdensome for restaurants," reports Nixon.

The state is majority Mormon and "(a)ctive members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints abstain from drinking alcoholic beverages," says Brigham Young University.

Zion is understood by Latter-day Saints to mean "a group of God's followers or a place where such a group lives."

And unlike the actual Iron Curtain that once separated the former Soviet bloc from the West, there is no free flow of people following the fall of the Zion Curtain.

The rules state that in restaurants without the partition, minors must be kept at least ten feet from anywhere alcohol is poured.

As of midday Friday, around two dozen restaurants had been inspected and approved, Wood told *The Tribune* and in the coming weeks the department will be working through around three dozen additional applications.

The new rules are also making it pricier to buy alcohol in the state, increasing the liquor markup by 2 percent.

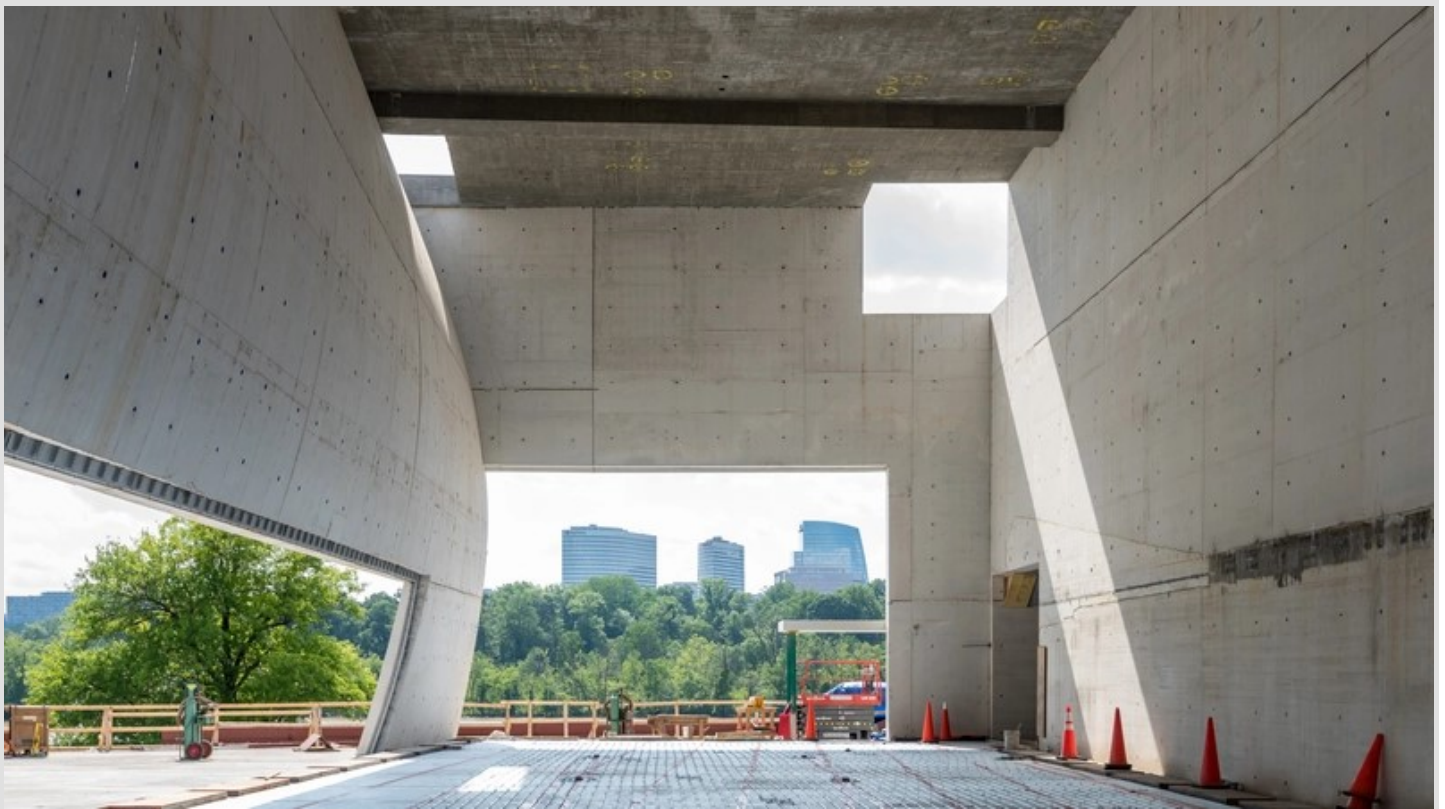
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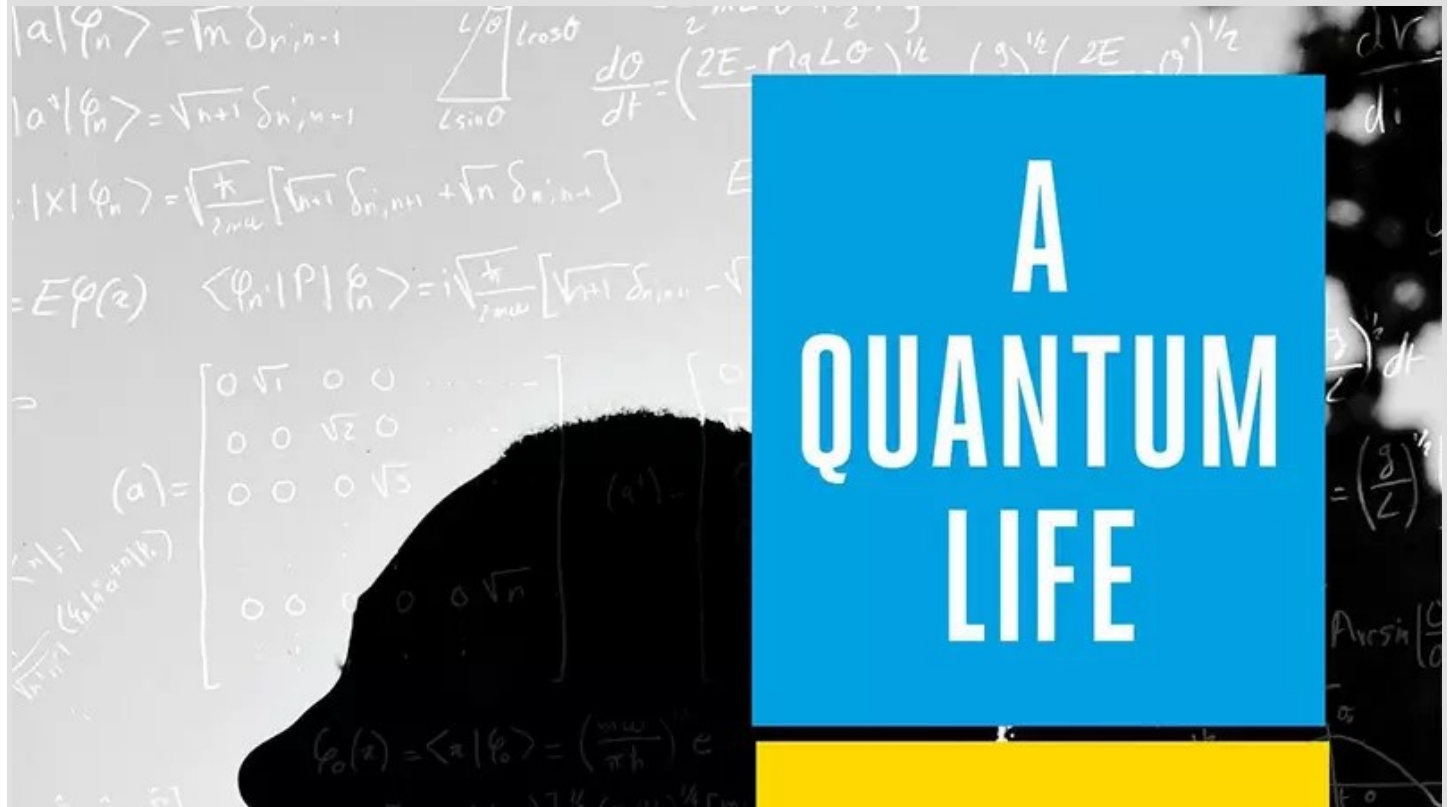
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