

TEETOTALERS CAN SERVE ON ALCOHOL BOARD JUST AS WELL AS IMBIBERS

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We need an ax murderer or extortionist on the Board of Pardons, according to the logic of those charging Gov. Mike Leavitt with stacking the Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission with teetotalers. You must have ``been there" and ``done that" to be an effective policymaker.

But some of the finest coaches never played the game. Consider the fallacious nature of the following statements:

Only past and present Olympians can plan quality Olympic Games.

Pilots must regulate the aviation industry.

Only crime victims qualify for jury duty.

University presidents are most adept members of the Board of Regents.

Bus drivers should oversee a transit agency.

Admittedly, these people may provide insight into their areas of expertise. But their backgrounds alone do not guarantee nor preclude quality input and oversight. They may proffer advice through a variety of channels without sitting on a board or commission.

A vegetarian on the Beef Council, for example, would provide a refreshing and objective perspective that somebody bogged down in too much beef might miss. There should be at least one carnivore on the beef board, but others could be herded in to provide expert testimony as needed.

Assuming that non-drinkers cannot understand alcohol issues because they prefer their Coke without rum is simple-minded. Yet several have waxed indignant over the benign issue.

Perhaps the governor should further designate board seats for a social drinker, lush and A.A. Alum when making his appointments for greater insight?

Critics may be trying to make some sort of moral/religious item out of a regulatory matter that is appropriately handled by any clear-thinking group willing to do its homework. Having a pina colada in hand is not essential to the policy process.

The Utah Hospitality Association, which represents restaurants and private clubs that serve alcohol, had hoped the governor would name a drinker to fill the term of outgoing member Jerry Fenn. That is not surprising. Leavitt instead tabbed non-drinker Larry Lunt for the post.

Fenn, himself a teetotaler, was considered by observers to be the dominant personality on the board and adept at understanding intricate issues involving Utah's complex liquor laws. Leavitt reportedly likewise views Lunt as a ``good thinker" and ``good problem-solver." Neither man's drinking habits came into serious play one way or the other because they were irrelevant.

The governor has made two new appointments to the five-member Alcohol Beverage Control Commission, one a drinker and one not. Two reappointees happened to be nondrinkers. Ho-hum. No news there. Reappointing someone doing a reasonably good job on myriad boards and commissions is standard operating procedure.

Certainly an argument exists that those who do not drink may not initially understand aspects of alcohol consumption and its mores like those who do. But those on the dry side may become very familiar with the industry and help create appropriate regulations in spite of personal beverage preferences. They don't live in a vacuum and probably have friends and/or family members who imbibe.

When I was 3 years old, good-hearted grandparents used to give me the whiskey-soaked

cherries from their emptied Old Fashions before dinner. That practice ended about age 6, and the only outcome was a lasting love of maraschino cherries. It did not enhance credentials to serve on the ABCC.

A drinker may or may not be skilled at setting policy and understanding various constituencies related to alcohol regulation. There is no sure rule of thumb, no cause-effect involving drinkers, non-drinkers and good guidelines.

The only downside to not planting more imbibers on the commission is that the meetings are bound to be dull. Few things enliven the stodgy regulatory process like a three-martini lunch.