

## **Guilt by Association**

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Judging from events in recent weeks, it has become apparent that only local drinkers are a danger to the state, at least in the minds of state officials. Liquor is being stockpiled for Olympic visitors, special courts for the visitors have promised to be gentle, and LDS Church attorney Jerry Fenn, who condemned loosening liquor advertising, successfully represented a restaurant seeking a liquor license. Meanwhile, requests for bills related to alcohol consumption are piling up at the Legislature, most likely to be dealt with after the Olympic visitors leave. The message seems to be that only those who live in Utah are irresponsible drinkers.

Fortunately, Olympic visitors are being granted the benefit of the doubt during their stay in Utah. With any luck, locals can attend some of the cosmopolitan events and learn how to drink responsibly. If the Legislature holds off on new liquor restrictions until after the Olympics, it can grant those who took classes from Olympic visitors special dispensations from the new laws.

A simpler approach, of course, would be to treat locals in the same manner as the Olympic visitors. The Legislature should be tough on multiple drunken-driving offenders, but the majority of locals who enjoy an alcoholic beverage should not be viewed as drunken drivers in the making. One proposed law illustrates the problem. The bill eliminates the current warning signs required at places which sell liquor that "the consumption of alcoholic beverages . . . may be hazardous to your health and the safety of others." These signs presume that a person may choose to control drinking so as not to become a hazard. The new bill would require signs stating "driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs is a serious crime that is prosecuted aggressively in Utah." Under this bill, alcohol drinkers are assumed to drive drunk. Adding to the insult, legal imbibers are also implicitly classified with illegal drug users.

Olympic visitors won't be subjected to such accusatory signage. The state will ensure that visitors have a wonderful time and feel free to engage in legal adult behavior, punishing only those who actually break a state law. Locals should be granted the same presumption of innocence. Drunken driving is a crime and should be prosecuted. Drinking an alcoholic beverage is not a crime for those of age and should not be treated as one, regardless of a person's state or country of origin.