Loosening liquor laws on businesses

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# Introduction

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Utah has always been a hotspot of dispute and discussion of local liquor laws. There has always been a tug-of-war on how tight or how loose the regulations should be. While we all agree that alcohol causes impairment that can lead to serious harm to one’s self or others, we still wonder if Utah’s famous quirky laws are too restrictive. Or is everywhere else too lenient? There are many opinions to be taken into account and it is always going to be a difficult and long road to decide what is right and what is wrong. I believe that the liquor laws, in general, accomplish an admirable and desired effect; however some of the laws are, as many put it, “quirky,” unnecessary, or redundant. The liquor laws here in Utah may seem restrictive but Utah is not a dry state by any means. If you want a drink you can get one. Changing only a few laws would make the industry much more hospitable without causing a steep increase in DUI related incidents of death or damages.

# Why the laws aren’t so bad

http://www.madd.org/drunk-driving/campaign/state-stats/

Utah’s laws can seem harsh, and may make it difficult for one to go out and enjoy having an alcoholic drink. But the laws do accomplish good, according to MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving). Utah is ranked #1 in the country for having the lowest amount of DUI-related traffic deaths. Many variables could count in this, as Utah does have a high population of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, with their headquarters right in the state capital, Salt Lake City. Members of this faith restrain from imbibing any alcoholic beverages as part of law of health known as the Word of Wisdom. Less drinkers means less probability that there will be drunk drivers, but the population of the state continues to change as the percentage of non-LDS individuals rises. One can only then look to the harsh, yet obviously effective liquor laws as a result of the low number of DUI’s. Of course, even with the laws in place to prevent DUI’s from happening, there are those that will always find a way. DUI is a very serious offense that is prosecuted harshly in Utah, as any crime that could seriously harm or kill another individual should be. From the moment you are pulled over to the side of a road, even before you are convicted, the consequences begin to pile up. Your driver’s license will be taken away from you and you are given a temporary license that expires before even a month is over. On the 30th day you may have your license suspended for a period of four months. Of course you are always able to appeal this, but your chances are not good due to the severity of prosecution in Utah. After being, “caught” you will end up spending a night in jail and will be given a court date within a month, in addition to possible home confinement. During your 24-48 hour sentence your car may be impounded as well. It is important to keep in mind that these consequences are viable on your very first offense, and that they compound exponentially on second and third offenses. For example, your first DUI offense has a minimum 120 day suspension of your license. Second and third offenses are a minimum of 2 years suspension. One night driving drunk can prevent you from driving for the next two years, at the least, keeping in mind any other consequences such as a DUI related death of the driver or the other party. With such harsh punishment it is easy to see why Utah is so well ranked on the MADD’s national map.

http://dui.drivinglaws.org/utah.php

# How the liquor laws hurt Utah’s economy

 Utah’s laws can make it a bit harder to get a drink, but it is worth the price to save lives. However some laws have yet to yield any proof that they prevent DUIs. Laws such as banning drink special promotions, either happy hours or daily specials, are going to become extinct in Utah with the philosophy of increased availability and encouragement to drink increases the consumed amount. However as of now this idea is just that, an idea. No quantitative results have been given to show that having drink specials increases public risk of alcohol related incidents. By eliminating these specials, the state has taken a facet of competition out of the hospitality industry’s repertoire. No longer can you attract customers in on a Friday night to have half price drafts, while still requiring them to purchase food with their alcohol. It’s one set, static price, all of the time. Making prices even worse, is that restaurants are required to purchase their alcohol from the state at retail prices. Some of the even stranger laws include having doubles illegal, which makes sense to prevent drunkenness, except for the easy and perfectly legal loophole. Mixed drinks are allowed to have a standard 1.5 ounce dose of alcohol per drink. However you can simply order a “sidecar” with your drink for an additional shot of liquor. But the mixing of these two in the hands of your server is forbidden. This law is redundant. Making doubles illegal, but allowing a sidecar is unnecessary; people who want to drink are going to drink. In addition to dancing with the rules to get your margarita to have 2.5 ounces of liquor, you are unable to have the experience of watching your bartender prepare it, if you are in a newly opened restaurant. You may walk into an establishment and see the bar, or what’s visible of it, through a vertical sheet of frosted glass known locally as a, “Zion Curtain.” Within the past few years many of these barriers were taken down, much to the happiness of the people and customers who are a part of the establishment; however new restaurants are required to either prepare alcohol in a back room or behind a “Zion Curtain.” The goal is to keep alcohol out of the view of those who don’t drink. Those eligible to purchase liquor must be at least 21 years of age, and are capable of making decisions on whether or not to drink with or without the influence of having it within view. *"It's just kind of pointless to have clear glass in front of us. It really takes away from the personal experience of our customers," said Abbie Daggs, a manager at Stella Grill in suburban Salt Lake City. "A lot of people are surprised when they see it and ask about the Zion curtain, and we have to explain why it's there. They're always shocked."[[1]](#footnote-1)*  The decision on whether to drink or not is a personal issue, and parents should rely on talking with their kids about responsible alcohol consumption and not rely on state laws regarding Zion Curtains to prevent underage drinking.

<http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/money/52614533-79/research-alcohol-drinking-partitions.html.csp>

The most prominent limp that the hospitality industry has is due to liquor licenses. Many places are on a waiting list for a liquor license, including actual bars-places intended for drinking merriment. Some individuals like A.J. Kekel, have been waiting for more than eight months for their license. Mr. Kekel is the owner of Graffiti Lounge, and is keeping his business alive with solely low alcohol, (3.2%), beer. He commented*, “My application's been taken. My check has been cashed, and here I sit with just 3.2 beer and no liquor.”[[2]](#footnote-2)* Many chain restaurants are experiencing the same difficulties with licensing and have taken their expansion elsewhere due to such limited licensing. Fewer chains have been requesting licenses recently compared to 2008 when the recession was beginning to strike hard into business and economics. These businesses, both large companies and small local entrepreneurs, are both suffering from the lack of available licenses; and in turn this effects all of us Utahns, whether we drink or not. That is less taxes being collected and less jobs available, at the proposal of an idea that does not have supportive evidence to back it up. It suffices to say that a few changes could really give Utah’s economy a shot in the arm.

# Proposal

I’m proud to live in a state that has such good control over DUI’s, where we are the lowest amount of deaths in the country. It says something about the standards of our people and who we are as a population. However; tweaking a few of the laws could make Utah an even better place to live if they are changed right. I fully support the enforcement of our laws regarding DUI’s.

The restriction on 3.2% alcohol on tap does not need to be changed, it allows people their tasty beverage while keeping the amount consumed in check; however, doubles should either be legal, or the limit raised to a two ounce per drink standard, eliminating the unnecessary sidecar loophole. Zion Curtains are a hindrance to our hospitality industry and should be removed. A reinforcement of alcohol and substance abuse education would be a wiser choice to prevent underage drinking rather than putting the bottles behind a mysterious barrier that may incite curiosity itself. Last of all, the number of licenses should not be so limited, it ruins small business and stunts growth of chains in Utah. By increasing licenses we would be increasing our state’s revenue, and providing much needed jobs for our hardworking citizens. By implementing these changes we could make Utah a more friendly, fun, and productive state to visit and live in.

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1. <http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2009-05-12-utah-bars_N.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://www.npr.org/2011/08/12/139570716/businesses-criticize-utah-for-limiting-liquor-licenses> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)