

# [***As many cities sour on hosting the Olympics, Salt Lake City's enthusiasm endures***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BS4-86V1-JC5B-G1WM-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

SALT LAKE CITY — The International Olympic Committee was effusive in its support Wednesday for a decadeslong effort to bring back the Winter Games to Utah's capital city in 2034.

Unlike so many other past hosts that have decided bringing back the Games isn’t worth the time, money or hassle, Salt Lake City remains one of the few places where Olympic fever still burns strong. [*Olympic officials praised the city*](https://apnews.com/hub/international-olympic-committee) for preserving facilities and public enthusiasm as they kicked off their final visit ahead of [*a formal announcement*](https://apnews.com/article/olympics-winter-salt-lake-2030-2034-ioc-e7da1e36b747395f2417b5e8c1d33088) expected this July.

Reminders of the 2002 Winter Games are nestled throughout the city, from a towering cauldron overlooking the valley to an Olympic emblem stamped on manhole covers downtown. Leaving the airport, a can't-miss arch amid snow-capped mountains shows visitors [*they're entering an Olympic city*](https://apnews.com/general-news-918862a9f27f49fb92b5c9b0dc0b8c17).

Those remnants are part of a long-term strategy Utah leaders launched on the heels of their first Olympics to remind residents that the Games are part of the fabric of their city, and that being a host city is a point of pride.

Olympic officials said they were greeted with such excitement Wednesday that it felt like the 2002 Winter Games never ended.

In the decades since Salt Lake City first opened its nearby slopes to the world’s top winter athletes, the pool of potential hosts has shrunk dramatically. The sporting spectacular is a notorious money pit, and [*climate change*](https://apnews.com/article/winter-olympics-sports-environment-and-nature-beijing-environment-db61d01a980bdbcc86252523547aaada) has curtailed the number of sites capable of hosting.

Even though Salt Lake City got caught in a bribery scandal that nearly derailed the 2002 Winter Olympics, it has worked its way back into the good graces of an Olympic committee increasingly reliant on passionate communities as its options dwindle. The city is now a prime candidate if officials eventually form a [*permanent rotation of host cities*](https://apnews.com/article/winter-olympics-sports-salt-lake-city-ab52c1b5897da9979c990cf513942e16), Olympic Games Executive Director Christophe Dubi told reporters.

“We are in an environment here where we look for opportunities more than concerns,” Dubi said. “For the next 10 years, we're not so much looking at what is challenging, but what are the opportunities to work together.”

The committee was left with [*only two bid cities*](https://apnews.com/international-news-general-news-ef24e12d787d447e819b85bd645abe9a) for 2022 — Beijing, China, and Almaty, Kazakhstan — after financial, political and public concerns led several European contenders to drop out.

“The International Olympic Committee needs Salt Lake City a lot more than Salt Lake City needs the International Olympic Committee, or the Olympics,” said Jules Boykoff, a sports and ***politics*** professor at Pacific University.

For Utah Gov. Spencer Cox, securing the bid is central to his goal of cementing the state as North America's winter sports capital.

Cox has continued a long-running push by state leaders to beckon professional sports leagues and welcome international events like last year's [*NBA All-Star Game*](https://apnews.com/article/golden-state-warriors-dallas-mavericks-nba-politics-sports-3b111d23f9103dc7e5501aec09699eeb) that could help burnish its image as a sports and tourism mecca, while chipping away at a lingering stigma that Utah is a bizarre, hyper-religious place.

About half of the state's 3.4 million residents and the majority of state leaders belong to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, widely known as the Mormon church.

Dave Lunt, a historian at Southern Utah University who teaches about the Olympics, said the Games give members of that faith, and other residents, a chance to clear up misconceptions and share their values with the world.

“Latter-day Saints really just want to be liked. No disrespect or anything, that’s my community, but there's this history of, we want to show that we fit in, we’re good Americans," he said. "We’re happy to host the party at our house.”

The 2002 Games, widely regarded as one of the most successful Olympics, brought government funding for a light-rail system and world-class athletic facilities. The city grew rapidly in its wake.

Utah bid leaders declined to release a budget estimate, saying they should be able to provide one next month. But they assured the committee that they could keep costs down by using most of the same venues they’ve spent millions to maintain since 2002. They also touted bipartisan support for hosting in the Democratic capital city of a predominantly Republican state.

[*With few options*](https://apnews.com/article/ioc-winter-olympics-hosts-salt-lake-city-ebaf786ec917d62d754c77c6fe45c37d) remaining for the Olympic committee, Salt Lake City has leverage to dictate terms, Boykoff said. Those can include funds, deadlines and even which sports are included.

And with NBC’s multibillion-dollar broadcasting contract with the Olympic committee set to expire in 2032 — two years before Utah would host — the committee has a vested interest in selecting a U.S. city in a better time zone for live broadcasts to entice U.S.-based broadcasting giants.

Unlike many cities, Salt Lake City residents did not get to vote on whether they wanted another Games, even as leaders say their polling shows more than 80% approval statewide.

Olympic historians say the hype can distract residents from downsides for other hosts, such as gentrification, corruption, rising taxes or empty promises of environmental improvements.

So far, no opposition has formed in Utah.

"If we consider the Olympics a cultural institution," Lunt said, "maybe it's worth paying some money if the people of Utah decide that's important to us, collectively.”

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