



GENERAL SESSION

October 26, 2011

Program Topic: Tolerance – The Bare Minimum

Presented by: WSLC Pres. Sylvia Rickard
WSLC Pres. Elect Kari Malkovich

Speaker: Linda Walton APR CEO; The Walton Group

Ms. Walton offered a brief overview of her philosophy that tolerance in human relations is more than just “tolerating” other people. To illustrate, she recounted her first experience with how unexpected kindness affected her own life. Her high school choir was given the opportunity to perform as a warm-up act for the pianist, Van Cliburn. Knowing she could not afford the trip, her choir director volunteered to pay for her expenses out of his own pocket.

Ms. Walton’s years of community involvement in various organizations have also revealed surprising ironies in human behavior. For example, meetings of the Disaster Association are very well attended as representatives of all faiths work together. However, many of the participants will not attend meetings of the Ministerial Association because “there are Mormons there.” Some who have had no problem working with Mormons for disaster relief still resent the fact that Mormons are

represented on the platform at the National Day of Prayer.

Anger seems to be escalating in the national dialogue, Ms. Walton said. Tolerance is often hyped, but rarely practiced. It should not even be the end goal of a civilized society, she argued. It should only be the means to a higher goal. Loosely quoting Voltaire, she reminded the audience that, “I may argue with what you say, but will defend your right to say it.” It’s instructive to note The Utah Valley Student Interfaith Association’s first statement of belief is not civility. It is the Golden Rule. Tolerance is the bare minimum.

Responding to questions, Ms. Walton acknowledged that kindness can be difficult to practice in the world of politics, particularly regarding hot topics. Emotions run high. But kindness and empathy can actually achieve far better solutions than when discord is permitted to cloud issues.

Reported by Pam Grange

General Session II

Program Topic: Approach to Issues – Agreeable Disagreement

Presented by: **WSLC Pres. Sylvia Rickard**
 WSLC Pres. Elect Kari Malkovich

Speakers: **Jim Dabakis – State Chair; Utah Democratic Party**
 Dave Hansen – Former State Chair; Utah Republican Party

Jim Dabakis first spoke about Redistricting. Civility is represented not only in what we say in public, but is also shown by the integrity we exhibit in what we do. A case in point is Redistricting this year in Utah. It was a disaster. He believes it was certainly a disservice to the Democrats and to the citizens of Utah. The Redistricting Committee dominated by the Republicans made a great show of inviting citizen input through its public meetings. Citizens were invited to express their views. Also, citizens were invited to draw their own plans and submit them to the committee. Mr. Dabakis feels that input was largely ignored. The process cost the taxpayers \$1million. The final congressional map was drawn in a closed Republican caucus over the course of several hours. The state Senate and House maps were also negotiated in closed meetings. Political influences dictated the result.

Mr. Dabakis cited political donations. The *Citizens United* case, wherein the Federal Supreme Court decision allowed companies and other private institutions to contribute unlimited funds to political actions and the D.C. Circuit court's extension of this ruling to Political Action Committees (Super PACs), will dramatically change the political landscape. The national budget has already turned into a political battle.

Mr. Dabakis cited the battle over the F22 fighter plane. The Congress wants it; the Military does not. Why does Congress want it? Forty-seven states will be working on the plane. This means a lot of jobs in a lot of constituencies. Utah alone could gain 2,200 jobs at Hill Air Force Base. So, Utah's Rep. Rob Bishop (R) is fighting for it.

Responding to questions, Mr. Dabakis said the National Intelligence Facility going into Camp Williams would cost over \$1billion. There are six of these facilities across the country. Whether that money would be better spent on cancer research or another worthy program is moot at this point.

Dave Hansen mentioned Redistricting. It is one of the most important things a state does every 10 years. Some people won't like the outcome, no matter what. He agreed it could always improve, but congratulated the legislature for going through the public process. It is a Republican state. Naturally, he said, the outcome will favor Republicans. In Utah, you can't create a Democratic district without the most egregious gerrymandering.

The legislature meets for 45 days each year to consider a thousand bills. He said the most important issue is the state budget, and noted, "We need to get serious people around a serious table," But what got the

most attention from the press? The “Feral Cat bill” (HB 210). Mr. Hansen pointed out that the state of Utah is well managed, overall.

Turning to civility, Mr. Hansen does not endorse the attitude of “if you’re with us you’re good; if against us, evil.” He sees the incivility in public discourse growing and doesn’t like it. Much of the Internet chatter is repulsive. The need for instantaneous news and also the anonymous Internet blogs contribute to the problem. He also mentioned Sen. Bennett as an example of a decent, good person who didn’t deserve the treatment he received in the 2010 election campaign. We should talk about issues and not engage in personal attacks.

As Sen. Hatch’s campaign manager, Mr. Hansen defended him against accusations of being too old, in office too long, and out of touch. The U.S. Senate operates on seniority, and the senator knows how the Senate works. He gets more done than most senators. If Republicans gain control of the Senate, Sen. Hatch will become Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee. It is the most powerful committee in the Senate, with control of over 60% of the budget. Mr. Hansen says Sen. Hatch makes a major effort to keep in touch with Utah.

It is also Mr. Hansen’s belief that, while the nominating process in Utah is not perfect, it works well. Every voter can participate in the caucus system, selecting party officials and delegates to the nominating conventions. He believes the delegates are the most knowledgeable, informed people in both parties.

Regarding Super PACs, Mr. Hansen said organizations should also have the right to free speech. The labor unions mask their political contributions as “voter education.” They spent \$1 billion on the last national election. Also, there can be no coordination between the PACs and the candidates.

Responding to questions, Mr. Hansen asserted Sen. Hatch is not back-pedaling on the work he has done in social services and health care by opposing the recent Healthcare Reform bill. The State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) sponsored by the senator has worked well. President Obama’s bill seeks to expand the program. Sen. Hatch opposes the expansion; not the program. Sen. Hatch will also continue his support for stem cell research.

Reported by Stuart Gygi

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