



GENERAL SESSION

October 23, 2013

Program Topic: Perspectives on State Issues

Presented by: National Issues Committee

Co-Chairs: Melanie Bowen & Kathryn Rowley

Speakers: Sen. Orrin Hatch (R) – U.S. Senator for Utah

**Frank Pignanelli – Attorney, lobbyist and political adviser;
former Minority Leader, Utah House of Representatives**

**Emily Ellsworth – Constituent Affairs Manager for U.S.
Congressman Chris Stewart (R)**

Sen. Hatch mentioned he is a former Democrat who changed political parties after he graduated from college. He responded to questions while addressing a wide variety of subjects. First, he said it is vital to pay off our national debt. The U.S. dollar is “the world’s currency” and its strength or weakness influences the economy of countries all over the world.

The senator said he did not support the methods used by some in his party who opted to impose a government shutdown over the Affordable Care

Act (ACA). However, he is not in favor of the law and believes it will be harmful to our economy. He remains in favor of a balanced budget amendment, and lamented the fact that such an amendment was once within a single vote of passage.

Are we facing another federal government shutdown in January? Sen. Hatch quoted U.S. Sen. Mitch McConnell from Kentucky as saying there is nothing to be learned “from a *second* kick in the head from a mule.” In essence, another shutdown would be worse than counterproductive for

both the nation and the Republican Party. The best legislation results from reasonable, responsible input and compromise from both sides of the aisle.

The senator asserted that the U. S. currently carries an astounding \$100T in unfunded liabilities, he continued. All entitlement programs will be severely impacted going forward if we cannot get federal spending under control. For example, some form of “means testing,” (formulas used to screen applicants for eligibility to welfare programs such as Medicaid) will likely need to be applied to the rapidly increasing Medicare population at some point in the future.

Sen. Hatch again stressed our national debt, saying it is an issue of national security. China’s ownership of U.S. debt is shifting the economic balance of power in its favor, giving it political leverage against us. If China were to call in its loans, the senator warned, the value of the dollar would plummet, disrupting our own and international markets worse than the 2008 financial crisis.

Turning to his thoughts on immigration reform, he stated it to be one of the country’s most important issues. We need to find sensible, compassionate and fair solutions. For example, he believes the H-1B program should be expanded. H-1B visas are available to companies wishing to hire a foreign worker if a

U.S. citizen or resident is not available. Currently, illegal residents face a 13-year wait to obtain U.S. citizenship. Regarding those who are in the country illegally and, “frankly, not going home,” he said the current national policy amounts to de facto amnesty.

Canada is successfully poaching many of our STEM (science, technology, engineering & math) professionals. We ought to be able, he said, to hire all the STEM experts who graduate from our own universities.

Recalling his work on The State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), Sen. Hatch said he was disappointed in the changes that were later forced into it. Ironically, they resulted in his having to finally vote against his own bill.

Frank Pignanelli, filling in for U.S. Congressman Jim Matheson (D), who was unable to attend, said he himself has been a frequent guest of WSLC since 1986. His mother was a member of WSLC. He expressed appreciation for the positive influence the organization has been on the women of Utah.

Immigration reform is a great concern to Congressman Matheson. The issue is key to our own state. Utah has a real and continuing need for a reliable immigrant labor force. We should also be aware, Mr. Pignanelli said, that undocumented residents could also make significant contributions to

technology in our state. Additionally, we should be mindful that over 1/2 of the membership of the LDS Church is Hispanic. Both the political far right and far left are becoming stumbling blocks to constructive immigration reform, each for its own reasons.

Another mounting issue is healthcare reform. A basic problem for the ObamaCare system, he said, is that if enough people don't sign onto it, the whole system will collapse. Although problems are arising with its implementation, he hopes they will be resolved soon.

Everyone can agree, he urged, that reform of some kind does need to occur. For example, pre-existing medical conditions should not preclude coverage. Catastrophic illness' medical bills can bankrupt a family. He stressed that, although we may have concerns regarding the ACA, it is now the law and will not be going away. We need to find a way to deal with it.

Regarding the federal government shutdown, Mr. Pignanelli referred to a recent poll indicating Sen. Mike Lee (R) is facing his own political issues in its aftermath. Sen. Lee's popularity has dropped to 40% among Utahns. It will be interesting to see how that plays out in the coming months.

Mr. Pignanelli affirmed Jim Matheson to be a fiscally conservative Democrat who has proven himself adept at bringing forward good legislation for

the country. He is true to his earned reputation of reaching across the congressional aisle to get things done. Turning to the Utah caucus system and the emerging "Count My Vote" movement, Mr. Pignanelli said he supports the movement in general. However, he is not optimistic about the chances for the ballot initiative to prevail.

The current delegate system has seen far right activists assume greater control of the state Republican Party. Mainstream Republicans may not like that. However, it may be a surprise to some that the caucus system has also been instrumental in significantly weakening Utah's Democrat Party. Some years ago, far left groups obtained undue power within the party through the state nominating conventions. It's taken awhile to recover from that. Again, it will be interesting to watch this issue unfold.

Emily Ellsworth began by offering sincere regrets from Congressman Stewart (R) for being unable to attend, and extended greetings on his behalf. Responding to questions, Ms. Ellsworth addressed the hardship imposed on the state by the recent government shutdown.

When the parks within the state were closed, the governor's office was able to hammer out an accord with the federal government whereby Utah was able to re-open the parks, using its own funds. Implicit in the accord was Washington's ability to reimburse the

state. It remains to be seen whether the payback will come through. Subsequent to the park closures, Rep. Stewart's office has been working on a bill to put language in place whereby any state could do the same as Utah has done, should the need arise again.

Ms. Ellsworth's particular specialty is immigration. She has handled immigration cases routinely for the past five years. She shares the congressman's belief that the foundation for real immigration reform must be to repair the current *legal* immigration process. It is currently unwieldy, unfair and very often incomprehensible.

Rep. Stewart, she said, supports a reasonable pathway to citizenship. It would need to be a long & certifiable process. Piecemeal efforts in the

direction of reform are often dismissed as unworthy of attention. However, they are the ones proven to be most meaningful in the long run. Sweeping proposals and mandates tend to be far less effective.

Finally, Ms. Ellsworth stated that Rep. Stewart voted with U.S. Reps. Rob Bishop, Jason Chaffetz and Jim Matheson to support the Continuing Resolution to fund the federal government and defund ObamaCare. She said that while the congressman does not support ObamaCare, neither did he support bringing the federal government to a partial shutdown over the funding of it. He believes the tactics used to force the shutdown were clearly bound to fail.

Reported by Pam Grange

**THIS BULLETIN IS A PUBLICATION OF
THE WOMEN'S STATE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL OF UTAH, INC.**
<http://www.wslcofutah.org>

**"CELEBRATING 93 YEARS OF SERVICE"
1920 - 2013**

President: Kari Malkovich
Advisor: Skip Reese
Editor: Pam Grange
Assist. Editor: Eileen Hallet Stone

*Printed by AlphaGraphics
117 West 900 South
Salt Lake City, UT 84101*