



GENERAL SESSION

January, 2014

Program Topic: Utah – The Best Managed State

Presented by: USLC Pres. Kari Malkovich

Speaker: Utah Lt. Gov. Spencer Cox

Lt. Gov. Cox, apologizing for the absence of Gov. Herbert, quipped that he's becoming accustomed to facing people all over the state who are "disappointed to see me," as he is often sent to stand in for the governor at speaking engagements. That being said, he expressed admiration to WSLC for its 94 years of service to the state. Engaging Utah's youth in positive political activity is a special project for him. He said WSLC sets a good example for our state's children in this respect.

Mr. Cox described Utah as leading the nation in many measurable areas, referring to it as "one of the brightest stars on the flag." He cited as one small example Utah's taking the initiative during the recent government shutdown to successfully negotiate the re-opening of its state parks. He described Gov. Herbert's leadership style as one that welcomes collaboration and diverse views in making policy decisions.

Responding to a question about air quality, he said all contributors to the problem are not equal. For example, running a wood

burning stove for one hour puts about the same amount of particulates into the air as a day of driving one (properly tuned) car. The sheer number of automobiles, however, does contribute most significantly to the air quality problem, especially on days when the inversion layer is present.

Addressing the issue of Medicaid, Mr. Cox acknowledged it to be a hugely complicated issue for Utah. Medicaid is a partnership between the state (30%) and the federal government (70%). At this point, there are people who neither qualify for Medicaid nor subsidies. They fall into what is called "the doughnut hole." The governor will be working with state legislators to deal with the problem of how to expand Medicaid under the mandate of Obamacare.

One particular Medicaid concern is the possibility that a few years hence, the financially strapped federal government will not be able to pay its promised percentage. The governor's office believes this is a real possibility, since the federal government has already reneged on three payment programs

to Utah. One of those important agreements is the Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILT).

Approximately \$35 million is owed annually to the state of Utah through the PILT program. It offers partial compensation for the lack of tax revenue that cannot be generated on federal lands. The situation was not remedied this year. Disappointingly, the recent budget bill that passed through

Congress did not provide the promised funding for PILT.

Lt. Gov. Cox concluded by inviting WSLC members to get in touch with him personally with questions, concerns, suggestion or requests. Those who are interested may communicate with him through his website at www.utah.gov/ltgovernor or at his email address spencercox@utah.gov.

GENERAL SESSION II

Program Topic: Utah's Primary/Caucus Convention System

Presented by: USLC Pres. Kari Malkovich

**Speakers: Taylor Morgan – Exec. Dir., *Count My Vote*
Sheryl Allen (R) – former Rep. for Dist. 19
James Humphrey – Spokesman, Protect our
Neighborhood Elections
Josie Valdez (D) – Vice-Chair, Utah Democratic Party
Dana Layton (R) – Dist. 60, Utah County (Orem)**

Taylor Morgan, speaking in favor of the *Count My Vote* movement, is a Republican state delegate. He spoke of his interest in politics being sparked by the vivid conversations around the dinner table when he was growing up. His mom ultimately went into public service, which was a great example to him.

A Dan Jones poll indicates many Utahns are still not familiar with the state caucus

system and the issues surrounding it. Utah's voter participation figures have fallen into those of the lowest ten states in the nation. Between the years 1960 to 1998, Utah's voter participation was well above the national average. Mr. Morgan said a state's election system can either hinder or encourage voter involvement. He believes the caucus system has become increasingly more restrictive over the years, which has

contributed in no small way to the declining voter interest.

Also, he continued, both political parties have lowered the percentage of convention delegate's votes that are required to shield a candidate from having to face a statewide Primary election. It dropped from 80% to 70% to the current 60%. Both special interest groups and money are directed to a small group of delegates at conventions. It's better, he reasoned, for candidates to be required to go out and engage more voters directly in a primary election.

Responding to questions, Mr. Morgan said the state's current caucus system is complicated and exclusionary. It can tend to prevent a wider variety of candidates from running for office. Greater access to the process may also lead to a much-needed increase in women candidates, as well.

Sheryl Allen, also speaking in favor of *Count My Vote*, recounted that as a former sitting legislator, she quickly learned she was often expected to pander to delegates as she considered what legislative positions she would take. She does not believe the caucus system is the best way to represent the most people possible throughout the state.

Addressing the issue of increased costs to candidates in a direct primary election, Ms. Allen said she is confident that candidates know enough to spend their campaign money where it does the most good. It can be wisely and economically done. Right now, she said, unless you're a delegate, you have little input in candidate selection. *Count My Vote* will put the process in the hands of all party voters. She also agreed that primary elections might well provide women a much better representation in elections.

James Humphrey, speaking in favor of the caucus system, said breaking down stereotypes will go a long way to achieving solutions for Utah's problems. For example,

he himself plans on running for the state legislature. As a Log Cabin (gay) Republican, he said he is sure he would have "zero chance" of winning a Primary election. There are simply too many voters in the state to plead his case to each voter with a personal contact.

Mr. Humphrey cited Sen. Hatch as a perfect example of someone who could not convince delegates to choose him as their candidate, even though he spent a whopping \$5M to do it. They forced him into a primary election. While it's true the power of delegates is great, the positive aspect of that power is that each delegate truly "has the ear of the candidate." Mr. Humphrey cited the fact that 50% of registered Utah voters turned out for the recent general election.

On the issue of women candidates, he said the numbers used by *Count My Vote* enthusiasts are not correct, although agreeing that women should be better represented. The nominating process, he insisted, is not at fault. Less than 20% of women ran in this year's municipal elections. However, the more telling statistic is that, of those who ran, 64% women won.

Responding to questions, he discounted the charge that delegates tend to be "extreme," saying nearly all candidates chosen actually end up being very reasonable people. He believes *Count My Vote* is also badly written. Utah's caucus system is actually the only "hybrid system" in the country. Iowa, for example, uses a straight neighborhood caucus system, whereas, we employ the best elements of both caucus and primary systems.

Josie Valdez, speaking in favor of the caucus system, brought an entertaining element of dramatic whimsy to the proceedings as she used costume props to make her presentation. She illustrated the various communication barriers between

opposing political persuasions as she emerged as “Lady Liberty.”

She then transformed into “Lady Liberty Latina” to instruct about the persuasive call of freedom to the disparate immigrant sensibilities in our state.

She supports the current caucus system, stating it is the one which will best encourage the most women and minorities to become candidates for political office.

She counseled that the caucus system will be most effective when we educate our citizens to be involved as neighbors and friends in this grassroots, participatory involvement.

Rep. Layton, speaking in favor of the caucus system, said this issue is not a partisan issue. She stated that when she became a candidate, she was a private citizen, political outsider, small business owner and mother. She never would have been able to make the financial outlay to run for office in a direct primary election. However, she *was* able to take on the much more modest financial risk afforded to her

by the caucus system. In her case, she ran against a popular known incumbent and ultimately had to make the financial sacrifice required by a primary. But the caucus system gave her the initial chance to try.

Rep. Layton believes the caucus system, beginning as it does in neighborhoods, represents the best virtues of a republic. To her point, she invoked Benjamin Franklin. The story goes that as Benjamin Franklin emerged from Independence Hall at the close of the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, a woman asked him, “Well Doctor, what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?” Mr. Franklin replied, “A republic, madam – if you can keep it.”

Responding to questions, she re-affirmed that neighborhood caucuses are the nearest, most direct process available to every voter. On the other hand, she believes low information voters are the ones who most often fall prey to the big media campaigns (glossy colors, slogans, etc.) employed in direct primary elections.

Reported by Pam Grange

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