

## **Speaker's 2014 Legislative Session Opening Remarks**

Good morning. Dear friends, trusted colleagues, treasured family and honored guests: Welcome.

Welcome to the Utah State Capitol and welcome to the people's house.

We meet at the beginning of a year, in a time of great promise in an era of unlimited possibility.

We know that the heart of our state is strong and the will of our people is true.

With Washington in chaos and uncertainty in so many corners of our country, Utahns should be proud of what we have and what we have built.

What we stand for and who we stand up to. What we believe in and what we dream of.

Our today is intact. But what of tomorrow?

We face no current crisis, but we are nonetheless at risk: The risk of not being ready for tomorrow.

Our economy is growing, but not as robustly as it should.

Our schools are educating, but not as effectively as they must.

Our traffic is moving, but not as efficiently as we would like.

Our state is breathtakingly beautiful, but blanketed by dirty air and severe pollution that is here today and gone tomorrow, only to return again.

Make no mistake: Utah is our home. This is still the place.  
But we should do far better than rest on our laurels, much better  
than pat ourselves on the back.

Can we truly say we've kept our shoulder to the wheel?

That we've pushed only forward, and blazed new trails?

There's a sense we're settling. And settling for the stale status  
quo.

And we know what status quo means. It's Latin for: *The mess  
we're in right now.*

Are we adrift in a sea of contentment?

Are we coasting and thinking we're moving forward?

We'd better not.

Because there's only one way to coast: **Downhill.**

In many policy areas we've settled for good enough. We've been  
content with commonplace, and we've even settled for stagnation.

Don't we deserve better? Our schools surely do.

Education is a public trust we share with all our children and all of  
society.

And Utah is blessed with the most involved parents and most  
committed teachers in the country.

But while our commitment to education is as strong as ever, commitment is not enough.

Reliance on the ways of the past will not meet the needs of our children today, or properly prepare the leaders of tomorrow.

When we were students, schools were made up of a classroom, a book, and a blackboard. Now it could just as easily be a Kindle, a Skype call and Wi-Fi.

And yet: What's the most frequent education conversation in the Capitol?

Money.

How much? And why not more? When is it coming? And why not before?

The wars over funding that have echoed through this Chamber have been unpleasant and unproductive, demands for higher spending, without the higher purpose to go with it.

To be sure, we should be proud of the investments we've made in our schools, especially in tough times.

Instead of looking at budgets and thinking they're too small, let's look differently at schools and urge them to think big.

We need nothing less than an education renaissance in Utah, a modernization that embraces the best of our traditional approach and expedites a break with the outdated ways of the past.

We understand the necessity of professional development, and that is why it's time to reinvest in the most important boy or girl in any classroom: The teacher.

But we must honestly come to terms with the governance challenges we face in education.

So let's re-connect the people of Utah with their State School Board. And let's encourage local leaders to take local control, engage local families and implement local solutions. But it is in the classroom, where we must encourage the most telling transformation of all.

I am deeply concerned that we are not connecting with kids and to kids, as long as we deny that training and technology fit together like a lock and key.

We can't simply demand that they put away their phones and their tablets and their laptops and believe we have created an optimal learning environment.

Let's engage the tools of today and intersect with the technology that students are using to learn everything in the world right now.

Let's ensure that every K-12 student has access – and the understanding – of the technological devices to ensure their success in the economy of tomorrow.

But these are not shortcuts to a lifetime of learning. A smartphone is really just a device, a tablet just a tool.

Let's open up the possibilities of a new school infrastructure.

The movement to embrace science, technology, engineering and math is a good step in the right direction. But STEM is only just taking root. And it is only a strategy, not a solution.

Our schools are too important – the stakes are simply too high – for us not to come together and not deliver the very best.

We must also take an honest look at our system of transportation infrastructure development. It has served us well and taken us far, but it needs a fresh approach and it needs new ideas.

Of which a gas tax increase is neither fresh, nor new. Nor right. I'm not persuaded that a blanket tax increase in the gas tax is the long-term answer to our long-term needs. Not when so many Utahns are driving many miles to get where they need to go, on tighter and tighter budgets.

Let's revisit historical suggestions and put them to the test of present transportation need and current economic reality.

And while we talk about getting from point A to point B, the reality of living in valleys means we must consider our air quality and do something about it.

For those who demand that government impose stringent controls on where our citizens can go and what days they can go there, I ask this question: Is that the Utah way?

And I would issue a challenge: Let's get more creative. Voluntary measures with concrete impact.

- Work with and not against our business community.
- Allow employees to work from home and telecommute.
- Support transit passes and encourage flex-time shifts.
- Encourage travel in off-peak hours to reduce emissions during red air days.

There are many, many more sound ideas. And the House Clean Air Caucus is bringing forward many creative proposals and I applaud them for their sincere and bipartisan efforts.

The reality is also that cutting-edge technology and innovative design allow us to drive faster and further, in cars and trucks that are bigger and heavier.

Tomorrow promises even more: CNG vehicles, electric autos, extended battery power, cleaner-burning cars and the race to zero emissions.

Let's let creative people offer creative solutions, and let this session be a time that they are free and encouraged and rewarded for doing it.

We may be part-time legislators, but we're all full-time public servants. We are looked to and asked of, and I know we wouldn't have it any other way.

But with resolve must also come restraint.

Limited government is more than a preference, it is a principle. And it has served Utah well.

The people don't measure us by the number of bills we pass.

And we certainly don't get paid by the page.

So let's make this session busy and brimming with big ideas, about schools, about our lands, about our way of living, about our quality of life.

We will meet these challenges not because they're easy. They're not.

And not because it will make us popular. It won't.

We will do it because it's the right thing to do.

It is up to us because in the American Experiment, the states are the laboratories of democracy. Not the Congress. Not the Courts. The states.

The cause of state sovereignty is not a new talking point in a permanent political conversation, **it is the birthright of every single one of us.**

Governor Herbert said once that we are not a colony. That's true. But words alone won't keep it that way. We need more. Much more.

This may seem an old fight, but it has new urgency as Washington and the White House push states like Utah to bend to their will.

The federal government doesn't ask. It dictates. It doesn't inquire. It instructs.

And every time a state surrenders, or a governor gives in, that state grows weaker and poorer and less free.

So let us encourage the Governor to lead and not just follow, be innovative and not just reactive.

We need energy in the executive, not an *inaction* figure in the Governor's Office.

That is why I cannot support and do not understand why anyone would propose to saddle Utah with Obamacare, the most costly and catastrophic federal mandate of all.

It won't help us bring compassionate service to those most in need.

And it surely won't solve any of our serious health care challenges.

Take it from a nurse: Band-Aid solutions never last.

President Obama's scheme to swell the Medicaid rolls in exchange for a partial and temporary federal subsidy isn't just a trick. It's a trap.

It's an out-in-the-open bait-and-switch guaranteed to leave us worse off, and sooner than we think.

So here's a suggestion:

The next time the Obama White House offers more unfunded mandates or another box of federal decrees, and the Governor's Office tries to figure out how to pay for it.

We as a House and we as a state should politely decline, drop a copy of the Constitution inside and stamp it **Return to Sender!**

One focus we must bring new attention to is one of the last I thought we'd have to take charge on: Honesty in government, trust in our institutions, belief in the system and faith in the process.

Last year saw us compelled to handle one of the saddest chapters I've seen in my time here, and yet it has also brought about one of our finest hours.

Some questioned the amount that we were forced to spend to find the truth about the former Attorney General. And they are right in one sense. It did not come cheap.

But if nothing else, we should resolve that honest government doesn't come at a discount. And public integrity **has no price**. When I sought this post, I promised no ambition to be the most powerful Speaker in Utah history ... just the most empowering.

And the past years have been some of the most proper and productive sessions in the history of our state.

The credit goes first and foremost to you: 74 of the most decent and honorable people that I have ever known.

And it is honor to serve with every one of you. Thank You. As you know, I'm especially fond of this magnificent Capitol. For it stands as a symbol of the most we can expect of ourselves and the best we can offer to others.

And yet, so many times over so many years, in the haste and hurry of this session or some meeting, or some committee, sometimes I would walk into this building, as if it were, well, just another building.

We shouldn't do that. When we come to work tomorrow, let's pause and let's reflect and admire the privilege we all have to walk here, to work here, to serve here.

I want to make sure I mention four very special friends this morning. I don't think anyone works harder days or longer nights around here.

I mean, of course, the Capitol's four lions.

Two to the east and two to the west, protecting, literally, our front and back. But while they seem to stand guard, they really inspire us most of all.

They are named fortitude, integrity, honor and patience. And for a very good reason.

Four of our finest virtues, four of our most consequential qualities, four of our most important aspirations as a people.

Fortitude, integrity, honor and patience will see us through no matter the difficulty and no matter the challenge.

Tomorrow is a sad day in our nation's history: 28 years since the Space Shuttle Challenger was lost only moments into its voyage.

Many saw it happen live. Many more remember President Reagan's words to the nation later that evening: That the Challenger Seven had "*slipped the surly bonds of Earth, to touch the face of God.*"

But there's something else he said that day.

When the accident occurred, the President was actually meeting with journalists discussing the State of the Union Address, which was to take place that very night.

As the terrible news became known, the press started peppering the President with questions. About NASA, about Congress, about the Soviet space program. He mostly declined comment.

Then one questioner asked: Because a schoolteacher was also lost on the Challenger, was it right for a civilian to have been on board?

President Reagan answered right away: "*They're all civilians.*"

We are all civilians. We may be Republicans or Democrats, Conservatives or Liberals, Rural or Suburban. But we are all Utahns first.

We have been given a great responsibility, and a sacred trust.

We are the guardians of something great, and the keepers of a tradition like no other.

Let's be committed to the higher purpose of the common good.

Let us never forget who sent us here or why we chose to serve.

Let us represent what is best about this Chamber, the Capitol, and the State of Utah.

Thank you all very much. And now, let's get to work.