

1 **CONCURRENT RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING UTAH'S**
2 **IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIP WITH WESTERN GOVERNORS**
3 **UNIVERSITY**

4 2021 GENERAL SESSION

5 STATE OF UTAH

6 **Chief Sponsor: Michael K. McKell**

7 House Sponsor: V. Lowry Snow

9 **LONG TITLE**

10 **General Description:**

11 This concurrent resolution recognizes and encourages partnerships between the state
12 and Western Governors University.

13 **Highlighted Provisions:**

14 This resolution:

- 15 ▶ describes Utah's workforce needs;
- 16 ▶ describes the history and purpose of Western Governors University (WGU);
- 17 ▶ recognizes WGU for WGU's leadership in delivering high-quality and low-cost
18 online postsecondary education; and
- 19 ▶ encourages partnerships between the state and WGU to address issues that prevent
20 Utah residents from participating in higher education.

21 **Special Clauses:**

22 None

24 *Be it resolved by the Legislature of the state of Utah, the Governor concurring therein:*

25 WHEREAS, Utah is consistently ranked among the top states in the nation in
26 measurements of states' economies and economic growth, including: best economic outlook,
27 best state in which to do business, best managed state, best state for private sector job growth,
28 best state for entrepreneurs, best state in which to start a business, and, perhaps most
29 importantly, best state for income equality and the middle class;

30 WHEREAS, in spite of Utah's comparative economic successes, the state's economy
31 has an identifiable workforce gap, and the demand for skilled labor for certain sectors falls far
32 short of the supply;

33 WHEREAS, the United States Chamber of Commerce reports that Utah has the fifth
34 lowest ratio of any state of job seekers to open positions, as Utah has 81,000 jobs open per
35 month, but only 57,000 available people to fill those jobs;

36 WHEREAS, Utah needs more competent and licensed professional teachers to address
37 consistent shortages in the education workforce;

38 WHEREAS, Utah needs more competent and licensed healthcare professionals to
39 address consistent workforce shortages in the healthcare workforce;

40 WHEREAS, Utah recently ranked third in the nation in terms of the severity of the
41 state's shortage of nurses;

42 WHEREAS, Utah's information technology sector consistently leads the nation in job
43 growth and creates an insatiable demand for competent, credentialed candidates to fill jobs in
44 that sector;

45 WHEREAS, approximately 370,000 Utah adults have some college experience, but
46 have not received a degree, and 10% of those adults would likely gain a full degree through
47 re-enrollment in higher education;

48 WHEREAS, the state of Utah seeks to partner with the best higher education
49 institutions to help all adult learners seeking to better their lives participate in higher education
50 to prepare for jobs in education, healthcare, information technology, and other high demand
51 fields;

52 WHEREAS, the state of Utah seeks to make higher education equitable, accessible,
53 flexible, high-quality, and affordable for adult learners;

54 WHEREAS, Western Governors University (WGU) was created to address modern
55 workforce needs;

56 WHEREAS, WGU is a private, nonprofit, online university that was created in 1997 by
57 19 sitting western governors, led by Utah's then Governor Michael O. Leavitt, in anticipation of

58 future labor needs in the growing areas of new technologies and practical workforce
59 expectations;

60 WHEREAS, WGU is the largest nonprofit online university in the nation;

61 WHEREAS, WGU's headquarters are in Salt Lake City, Utah;

62 WHEREAS, over 200,000 students nationwide have graduated from WGU with either a
63 bachelor's degree or master's degree over the past 23 years;

64 WHEREAS, WGU currently enrolls over 130,000 students nationwide;

65 WHEREAS, approximately 8,000 people in Utah are enrolled in WGU;

66 WHEREAS, as an outcome-oriented institution, WGU helps WGU students graduate
67 faster than the national average with less student loan debt and with measurable improved
68 employment opportunities;

69 WHEREAS, WGU invests in providing equity and access to higher education for the
70 state's highest-need adult learners;

71 WHEREAS, as a nonprofit university, WGU is a guardian of the public interest and
72 seeks to assist under-served populations, including minority, low-income, rural, and
73 first-generation adult learners; and

74 WHEREAS, WGU pro-actively seeks state and local partnerships, both public and
75 private, through projects designed to help those in need and advance fair treatment and equal
76 opportunity for all Utahns:

77 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislature of the state of Utah, the
78 Governor concurring therein, recognizes WGU as an integral partner with the state in achieving
79 all goals related to bringing more Utahns within reach of obtaining a higher education degree.

80 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the state of Utah recognizes the value of WGU's
81 thought leadership in higher education and WGU's many innovations in delivering
82 high-quality, low-cost, online education and looks forward to sharing WGU's practical
83 experiences and innovations with Utah's public institutions of higher education.

84 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the state of Utah seeks partnerships with WGU to
85 address and solve a myriad of issues and barriers that prevent Utahns from participating in

86 higher education including developing partnerships aimed at:

87 • contributing to community efforts to break the cycle of intergenerational
88 poverty;

89 • increasing access to affordable broadband services;

90 • reforming prisons to help incarcerated individuals develop skills;

91 • encouraging responsible borrowing to reduce student-loan debt; and

92 • promoting competency-based hiring practices, including supporting new
93 technologies that support those practices.

94 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislature and Governor view 2021 General
95 Session H.B. 328, Adult Learners Grant Program, as complementary to this concurrent
96 resolution because the program created in that bill would provide equity and access through
97 needs-based grant assistance for Utah's online adult learners.

98 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this resolution be sent to the Utah
99 Department of Workforce Services and the Utah Board of Higher Education.