

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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BROAD COALITION CALLS FOR INVESTMENT IN UTAH’S FUTURE

“Taxes are low already – the economy is good – now is not the time for even more tax cuts”

Salt Lake City – On Thursday, February 20, 2020 on the steps of the Utah Capitol, a broad and diverse coalition of Utah advocates for the poor, for persons with disabilities, for education, health care, clean air, and for a variety of other popular Utah priorities held a press conference calling on the Utah Legislature to avoid cutting taxes until it has developed a comprehensive plan to address Utahns’ top concerns by investing in Utah’s future.

Participants in the press conference included (in alphabetical order):

- Action Utah
- American Academy of Pediatrics, Utah Chapter
- Catholic Diocese of Salt Lake City
- Center for Biological Diversity
- Coalition of Religious Communities
- Community Action Partnership of Utah
- Crossroads Urban Center
- HEAL Utah – Healthy Environment Alliance of Utah
- Legislative Coalition for People with Disabilities
- Sierra Club Utah Chapter
- Utah Citizens Counsel
- Utah Education Association
- Utah Physicians for a Healthy Environment
- Utahns Against Hunger
- Voices for Utah Children

The effort was inspired in part by a [column in the Deseret News](#) by Zions Bank CEO Scott Anderson, who wrote, I hope the theme of the session that starts next Monday will be, ‘Investing in Utah’s future.’ Nothing is more important than preparing for, and investing in, the rapid growth that is occurring in Utah.... Utah taxes are relatively low — lower now than in many years. Investments in education, clean air and infrastructure will produce good jobs and preserve Utah’s strong economy.

The advocates pointed out that, according to recent reports from the [Utah State Tax Commission](#) and the [Utah Foundation](#), taxes in Utah are the lowest that they have been in decades, following repeated rounds of tax cutting. “We understand that tax cuts are popular, but we’ve reached the point where we have to ask: Is the current generation of Utahns doing our part, as earlier generations did, to set aside sufficient resources every year to invest in our children, in our future, in the foundations of tomorrow’s prosperity and quality of life?” said Matthew Weinstein of Voices for Utah Children.

The advocates laid out a positive vision of how all Utahns would benefit from enhanced investment in our state:

Jean Hill, Catholic Diocese of Salt Lake City: “As an active participant in many of the efforts to end homelessness in Utah, the Diocese of Salt Lake City has seen first-hand the impacts of rapidly rising rents and dwindling stocks of affordable housing. If we truly want to render episodes of homelessness brief, rare and non-recurring, we must invest in housing and supportive services for those on the brink or already experiencing homelessness.”

Jonny Vasic, Executive Director, Utah Physicians for a Healthy Environment: “Salt Lake County continues to be ranked in the top 10 as having the worse air pollution in the country, in both 24-hour particulate matter and in ozone. This leads to a long list of health issues and even premature death. We cannot pass this problem off to the next generation. There are solutions, but it starts with awareness and needs the combined effort of the community with strong political will from our leaders.”

Bill Tibbitts, Crossroads Urban Center: “Utahns want our leaders to improve housing affordability and reduce the number of children and adults who spend time in shelters or sleeping in cars. We not going to solve these big problems if we put off doing something about them until tomorrow.”

Dr. William Cosgrove, American Academy of Pediatrics, Utah Chapter: “The Utah Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics represents more than 700 Utah Pediatric providers. We are dedicated to the health, safety and wellbeing of all Utah children. Utah’s children comprise 30% of Utah’s population, but those children are 100% of Utah’s future. In order to achieve Utah’s best future, we must invest in the physical and emotional health of our children. We, as a community, are urging our leaders to provide each child access to:

- clean air, clean water, and safe food
- safe living arrangements
- adequate time with loving and attentive parents
- exposure to rich language and books as infants and toddlers
- excellent early childhood care and education to ensure they are ready for kindergarten
- teachers who are well-trained, adequately compensated, and have the resources they need
- safe, violence-free, neighborhoods to play and learn in

A young family cannot, by themselves, provide these things to their children. They need citizens in their communities and tax resources collected by the government to be invested into critical services and resources for the benefit of children. Historically, Utah has under-funded pre-schools and K-12 schools which has slowed the development and education of a generation of children. There is no better investment opportunity, nor better return-on-investment, than fully funding the education of Utah’s children.”

Clint J. Cottam, MPA, Executive Director, Community Action Partnership of Utah: “Community Action Agencies in Utah recently asked thousands of individuals to identify barriers preventing households and communities from achieving their full potential. Every assessment, whether in predominantly urban or rural regions, cited housing as the investment most lacking throughout Utah. Stories were shared of Utahns becoming sick from mold, experiencing homelessness, forgoing basic needs like medicine and medical equipment, turning down employment, or extending their commutes due to housing quality, availability, and/or affordability. Investments in increasing the quality, availability and affordability in the state will improve health outcomes and continue to keep Utah’s economy strong.”

Deeda Seed, Senior Utah Field Campaigner, Center for Biological Diversity: “This is not the time for tax cuts. The enormous growth we’re experiencing in Utah comes with many problems including the critical lack of affordable housing, polluted air, and the loss of open space. Addressing these problems costs money, whether its building affordable housing, taking steps to clean up our air, or

preserving open space. Our tax dollars should be used to support a sustainable healthy future for all Utahns and to address the impacts of growth.”

Utah Education Association President Heidi Matthews: “The growing Utah economy provides an ideal opportunity to make long-needed investments in the promise of a quality education for every Utah student. Rather than cutting taxes, we should be building futures.”

Cheryll May, Steering Committee Member, Utah Citizens Counsel: “The Utah Citizens Counsel maintains that every Utah child should have an equal opportunity for a healthy and productive life. Yet thousands of children from disadvantaged backgrounds enter kindergarten years behind their peers in basic knowledge and skills. High quality early-childhood education programs can greatly mitigate this deficit. Few Utah children currently have access to these programs. Extensive research shows that investments in such programs are cost effective. State programs supporting quality early education have been shown to save money in later years on remedial education, teen pregnancy, drug abuse, juvenile justice and corrections.”

Gina Cornia, Executive Director, Utahns Against Hunger: “Utah policy makers have always prided themselves on doing what is best for Utah families. Utahns Against Hunger urges them to embrace this perspective and reflect on how the important work they do during the session will impact the most vulnerable Utahns. Moving forward, we believe, that tax policy and budget plans should reflect a concern and a priority for those who too often go without or wait too long to for their situations to matter.”

Carrie Butler, Policy Director, Action Utah: “We at Action Utah believe that we are fortunate to live in a state rich with environmental and economic resources, and we support investment into the future for all Utahns. We encourage work on policies that matter most to a majority of Utahns, including funding for programs that assist our most vulnerable populations, funding for education, mechanisms that help reduce cost and expand access to healthcare, and programs that improve our air quality. We encourage the legislature to carefully consider these issues and prioritize funding them in responsible ways.”

Janet Wade, Legislative Coalition for People with Disabilities: “Individuals with disabilities and their families are often forgotten by policymakers when considering tax reform and budgets, but people with disabilities make up approximately 12% of the population of Utah and are an important part of the diversity in our state. Individuals with disabilities and their families require ongoing services and supports to effectively participate in our communities, schools, and workplaces. The Legislative Coalition for People with Disabilities (LCPD) believes that legislators have an ethical obligation to protect and serve this vulnerable and overlooked population, and we strongly urge the Utah Legislature to develop a long-term funding strategy to support Utahans with disabilities and their families, including those currently on the “waiting list” for DSPD services.”

Taken together, the advocates’ message amounts to a vision of a healthier, wealthier, better educated and more prosperous Utah in the future – if our leaders can resist the election-year temptation to cut taxes and avoid the public revenues losses that leave us unable to make the critically needed investments today that will pay off many times over in the future.

Finally, the advocates expressed gratitude for the hard work and sacrifice of Utah legislators, who willingly give of their time and energies in service to the people of Utah, grappling with the most difficult policy choices and budget tradeoffs, often without public understanding or appreciation. The advocates called on all Utahns to consider the example of earlier generations that sacrificed so that we could have a better state today.

OPINION

This should be the top priority for Utah's Legislature

By A. Scott Anderson, Contributor | Jan 23, 2020, 9:00am MST

As each Utah legislative session proceeds, a theme seems to emerge, whether intended or not. I hope the theme of the session that starts next Monday will be, **“Investing in Utah’s future.”**

Nothing is more important than preparing for, and investing in, the rapid growth that is occurring in Utah.

Investing in Utah’s future doesn’t just mean spending more money, although money is an important component. It also means putting the policies in place that will help Utah grow in such a way that preserves our enviable quality of life. Growth is inevitable, but we must plan for it and invest in it so that it doesn’t overload our highways and infrastructure, pollute our air and overwhelm our schools. We must plan for growth that produces good jobs that support a family.

That’s a lot to ask of Utah’s 104 lawmakers. But I believe Gov. Gary Herbert and current legislative leaders, to their credit, are focused on the future and want to establish policies and make investments to ensure Utah’s continued prosperity.

Here are some issues and topics worthy of legislative priority.

Education salaries

We need education investment that pays for more than just student growth and inflation. I hope lawmakers will carefully consider the Envision Utah study that makes a strong case to substantially boost teacher salaries. Great teachers make all the difference. Elevating the teaching profession by paying professional wages would be the single most important step toward excellent education that prepares our young people for the jobs of the future.

Clean air initiatives

Gov. Herbert recommended a bold investment of \$100 million to improve air quality. It is needed to begin implementing the recommendations in the air quality study produced by the Gardner Policy Institute at the request of the Legislature. Utah is making good progress

on air quality, but greater effort is required. Given our inversion-creating topography, we must reduce emissions more than almost any place in the country to have consistently clean air.

Homeless progress

The three new homeless resource centers are helping hundreds of people deal with the root causes of homelessness. But a legislative appropriation is needed to help pay the cost of building the centers. And more specialists are needed as people are diverted into programs dealing with housing, job training, mental health, physical health and addiction.

Low income housing

One symptom of Utah's population growth and strong economy is a housing crisis, especially for low-income families. Sen. Jake Anderegg, one of the Legislature's most conservative members, has become a strong advocate for sensible, cost-effective approaches to help resolve the housing crisis in Utah. His proposed legislation would make a positive impact.

Job creation in rural Utah

A variety of proposals will be made to improve the economies of rural Utah. Investment is needed there, especially because spreading out Utah's population will help relieve congestion and housing shortages on the Wasatch Front. We need to help rural Utahns take part in Utah's prosperity.

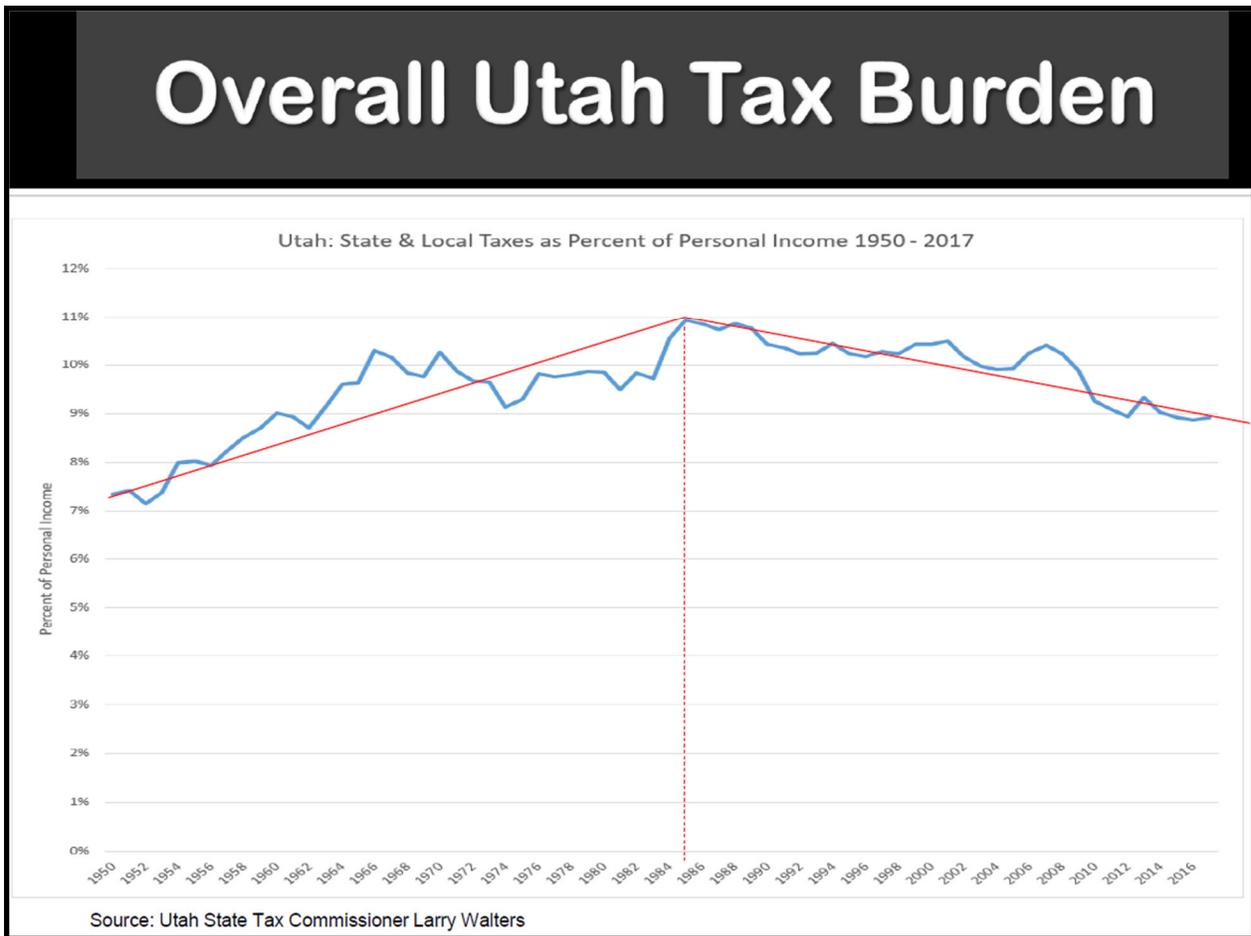
Mobility and public transit

Gov. Herbert's budget broke new ground by proposing a \$34 million investment to begin double-tracking the FrontRunner commuter rail system. This will help relieve freeway congestion. But we also badly need better public transit into our canyons. We are loving them to death. We also need more transit in underserved areas on both the east and west sides of the Wasatch Front.

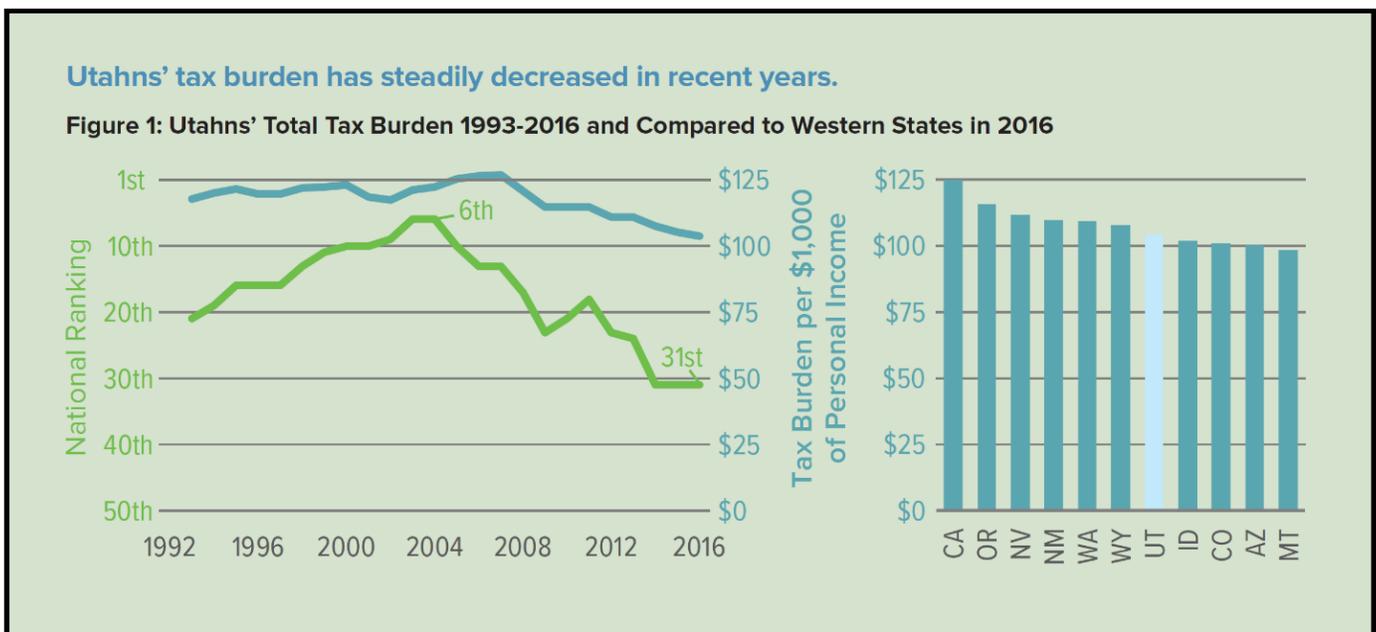
Most of these suggestions require additional funding. I recognize that funding resources are limited and, while many projects are worthy, everything can't be funded. But it's also important to remember that **Utah taxes are relatively low — lower now than in many years. Investments in education, clean air and infrastructure will produce good jobs and preserve Utah's strong economy.**

<https://www.deseret.com/opinion/2020/1/23/21075374/utah-legislature-herbert-education-air-quality-infrastructure-transit>

Utah's Taxes Are At Their Lowest Level in Decades



Source: <https://le.utah.gov/interim/2019/pdf/00003720.pdf> from TRET meeting 8-19-19
<https://le.utah.gov/asp/interim/Commit.asp?Year=2019&Com=TSKTRE>



Source: <http://www.utahfoundation.org/reports/a-lighter-load-utahs-changing-tax-burden/>