

Published: Monday, 23 January 2023 11:19

Written by: Matthew Weinstein



BROAD COALITION CALLS FOR INVESTMENT IN UTAH'S FUTURE RATHER THAN TAX CUTS, DOCUMENTS \$5.6 BILLION IN URGENT UNMET NEEDS

Salt Lake City – On Monday, January 23, 2023 at the Utah State Capitol, a broad and diverse coalition of advocates for the poor, for disabled Utahns, for education, health care, clean air, the Great Salt Lake, transportation investment, and a variety of other popular Utah priorities held a press conference calling on the Utah Legislature to prioritize addressing Utah's long and growing list of unmet needs over permanent tax cuts that undermine our long-term capacity to invest in Utah's future.

Utah's strong economy and rapid recovery from the pandemic, combined with the ongoing impact of federal spending, have generated unexpected state revenues amounting to a reported \$3.3 billion available for FY2024. These revenues put Utah in a position to address chronic revenue shortages that have plagued numerous areas of state responsibility. Instead, state leaders have proposed roughly half a billion dollars in permanent tax cuts, tilted unfairly toward the high end of the income scale, as well as additional hundreds of billions in one-time tax breaks.

Invest in Utah's Future Coalition: \$5.6b of unmet needs should be prioritize

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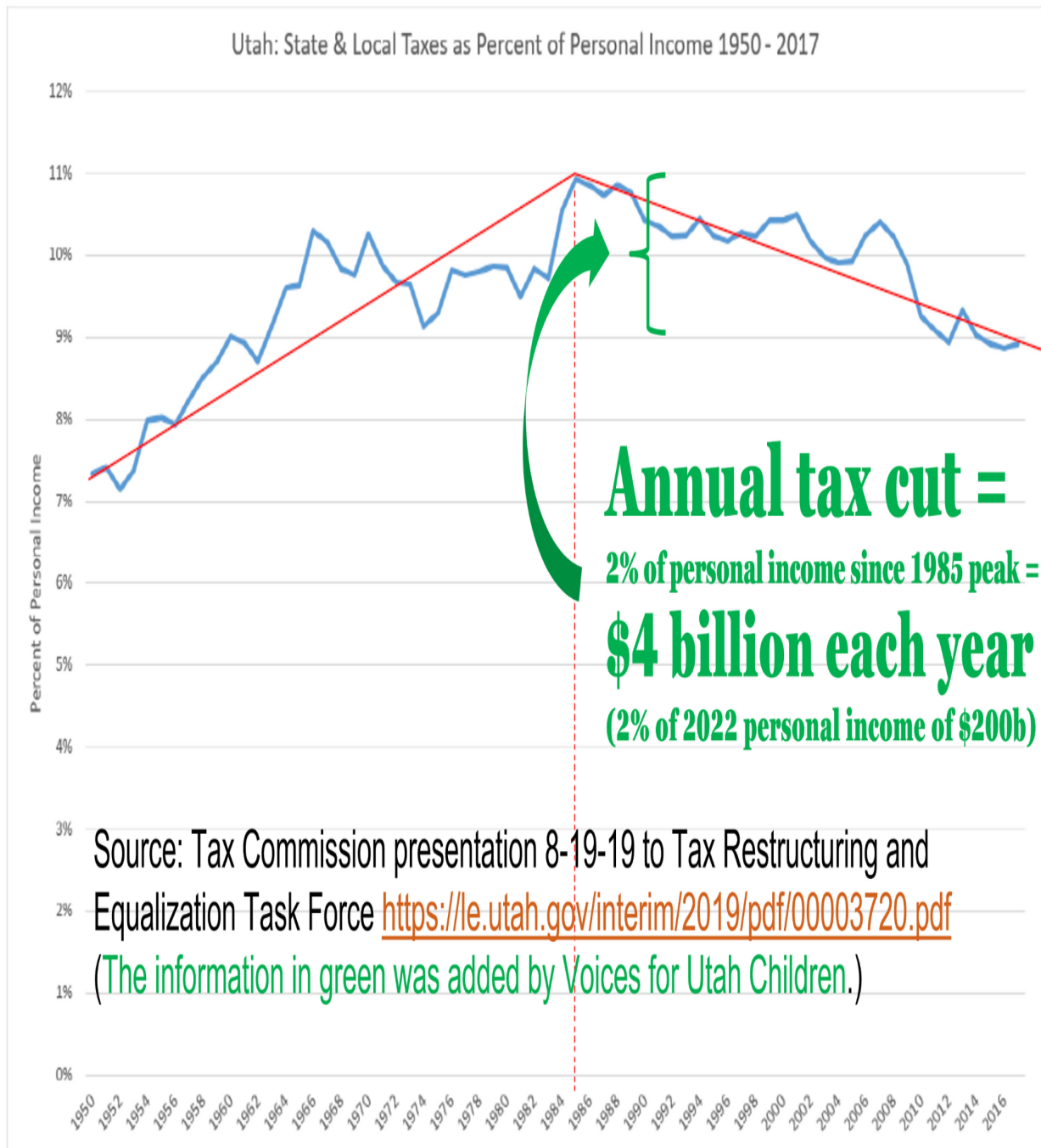
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These new proposed permanent tax cuts would be over and above the roughly \$4 billion that the Legislature has already cut from annual revenues in recent decades, leaving Utah's taxes at their lowest level in half a century, relative to incomes.

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The History of Utah's Overall Level of Taxation



Source: Utah State Tax Commissioner Larry Walters

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In response, today the Invest in Utah's Future coalition presented a list of urgent unmet needs amounting to \$5.6 billion, over \$2 billion more than the amount of the "surplus" revenues.

The advocates also pointed out that, according to data 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. "Of course we all like paying lower taxes, but at a certain point we have to ask ourselves: Is it possible to have too much of a good thing? Are we, as the current generation of Utahns, meeting our responsibility, as earlier generations did, to set aside sufficient resources every year to invest in our children, in our future, in the foundations of the next generation's prosperity and quality of life?" said Matthew Weinstein of Voices for Utah Children.

Speakers also referenced [public opinion surveys](#) by the Deseret News and Hinckley Institute that found that only 25% of Utahns support tax cutting over investing in Utah's future, consistent with [other polls](#) done in recent years by the same organizations as well as by [Envision Utah](#) and the [Utah Foundation](#).

Here is the list of urgent unmet needs that Utah has not been able to address due to the state's chronic revenue shortages:

Budget Area	Amount	Details	Contacts
K-12: Reduce class sizes from 29 to 15	\$1.1 billion (\$612m K-6 only)	Reduce class sizes/improve student/teacher ratio below the current Utah average of 29 (vs national average of 24) to optimum class size of 15.	Utah Education Association Director of Policy and Research Jay Blain Jay.Blain@myuea.org
K-12: Paraeducators	\$312 million	Expand paraeducators to all	Utah Education Association Director of Policy and Research Jay Blain

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		Utah elementary classrooms.	Jay.Blain@myuea.org
K-12: Increase school counselors	\$130 million	Increase school counselors per student to the national standard optimum of 1:250. Utah's current ratio is 1:648, compared to the national average of 1:455.	Utah Education Association Director of Policy and Research Jay Blain Jay.Blain@myuea.org
K-12: school psychologists, social workers and special ed teachers	\$285 million	Increase student access to school psychologists, social workers and special ed teachers. Current and optimal ratios are: School psychologists: Now 1:1950/Optimal 1:500 Social workers: Now 1:3000/Optimal 1:250 Special ed teachers: Now 1:35/Optimal 1:25	Utah Education Association Director of Policy and Research Jay Blain Jay.Blain@myuea.org
K-12 Education: reduce teacher attrition and shortages	\$500-600 million	Envision Utah estimates that we need to invest an additional \$500-600 million each year just	

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		to reduce teacher turnover, where we rank among the worst in the nation. Our leaders' unwillingness to solve our education underinvestment problem is why the majority-minority gaps in Utah's high school graduation rates are worse than nationally and our younger generation of adults (age 25-34) have fallen behind their counterparts nationally for educational attainment at the college level (BA/BS+).	
K-12 School Nurses	\$78.5 million	The Utah Dept of Health annual report "Nursing Services in Utah Public Schools 2021-22" found that it would cost \$78.5m to hire an additional 785 nurses so as to have one nurse in every public school building. There are currently only 261 nurse FTEs in Utah's public	Dr. William Cosgrove, Past-President, American Academy of Pediatrics – Utah wecosgrove@yahoo.com

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		schools, a ratio of 1 nurse for every 2,583 students. One nurse in every building would improve that ratio to 1:644, which would still be worse than the national average. https://heal.health.utah.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/2022-Nursing-services-in-Utah-Public-schools-8-22-22-ADA.pdf	
Full Day Kindergarten	\$70 million	Gov. Cox is proposing \$70 million in the FY24 budget to make full-day Kindergarten available to all Utah families who would choose to opt in to it.	Voices for Utah Children Anna Thomas Anna@UtahChildren.org
Child Care	\$236 million	\$236 million is needed to continue stabilizing the child care industry as federal funds are depleted. This funding will allow for the continuation of child care stabilization grants, retention incentives for early childhood professionals, the coverage of licensing-	Jenna Williams Jenna@UtahChildren.org

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		related fees in order to lessen the barriers to expanding, maintaining, and opening new child care programs, and regional child care outreach grants for rural and urban child care deserts. Source: www.utahcareforkids.org/get-involved/2023-legislation	
Pre-K and Child Care	\$1 billion	Well over \$1 billion is one estimate for a much needed comprehensive system of early childhood care and education (pre-k) in Utah.	
Afterschool Programs	\$3.6 million	Utah's 303 afterschool programs serve 43,000 kids but still leave 99,000 unsupervised every day after school. During the 2021 "21st Century Community Learning Center" grant competition in Utah, \$1,062,816 was available and there was \$4.6 million in	Utah Afterschool Network Director Ben Trentelman BenT@UtahAfterschool.org

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		requests, indicating a \$3.6 million funding gap.	
Health Insurance: Children: Cover All Kids	\$5 million	It would cost Utah about \$5 million to remove barriers to health insurance coverage so that all Utah kids can access health insurance. Utah currently ranks last in the nation for covering the one-in-six Utah kids who are Latinx and in the bottom 5 states for all children. Source: Voices for Utah Children and www.100percentkids.health	Voices for Utah Children Ciriac Alvarez Valle Ciriac@UtahChildren.org
Health Insurance: New parents	\$10 million	HB 84 would cost \$3m to extend post-partum Medicaid coverage for new parents from the current 60 days to one year. HB 85 would cost \$7m to extend Medicaid coverage to pregnant women with household incomes up to 200% of poverty level.	Voices for Utah Children Ciriac Alvarez Valle Ciriac@UtahChildren.org

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Mental Health & Substance Use Disorder Treatment	Uncertain	Utah ranks last in the nation for mental health treatment access, according to a 2019 report from the Gardner Policy Institute. A 2020 report from the Legislative Auditor General found that Utah's Justice Reinvestment Initiative had failed to achieve its goal to reduce recidivism -- and actually saw recidivism rise -- in part because "both the availability and the quality of the drug addiction and mental health treatment are still inadequate." (pg 51) Amounts not determined to address large gaps in workforce capacity, but two bills this year are: HB 66: \$11m for additional Mobile Crisis Outreach	
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		Teams and 2 additional Receiving Centers in rural parts of Utah HB 248: \$5m for additional Assertive Community Treatment Teams	
Disability Services	\$31 million	The DSPD disability services waiting list has more than doubled in the last decade from 1,825 people with disabilities in 2011 to 4,427 in 2021. The FY20 \$1 million one-time appropriation made it possible to provide services to 143 people from the waiting list, implying that it could cost \$31 million to eliminate the waiting list entirely. In the 2022 session, the Legislature added \$6 million in ongoing and \$3 million in one-time money to shorten the disabilities waiting list. This year, Rep. Ward is sponsoring	Legislative Coalition for People with Disabilities – Jan Ferre janisferre@gmail.com

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		HB 242 to dedicate additional base budget funding to reduce the waitlist by 200 people each year.	
Rural Utah Economic Development	\$20 million	Rural Utahns should not feel that they need to abandon their home communities and add to the growth pressures along the Wasatch Front in order to provide for their families. Rural economic development would benefit all Utahns and reduce disparities between the Wasatch Front and other areas of the state. \$20 million was one estimate for funding for economic development projects like the San Rafael Energy Research Center (Emery County) and renewable energy projects around Beaver County, both serving areas where primary jobs such as Smithfield Foods	Community Action Partnership of Utah - Stefanie Jones and Clint Cottam – Clint@CAPUtah.org

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		have left recently, and renewable energy projects have the potential to stabilize county economies.	
Reduce/Eliminate Benefits Cliffs	Uncertain	The existing benefits cliffs in many public anti-poverty programs – where public assistance disappears suddenly rather than phasing out gradually when someone gets a raise or takes a new, higher-paying job – act as an unintended obstacle to the efforts of low-income people to work their way out of poverty.	Circles Salt Lake – Kelli Parker Kelli@CirclesSaltLake.org
Sexual and Domestic Violence Victim Services	\$310 million OR \$68 million	Our economy incurs steep economic costs as a result of sexual and domestic violence. The Center for Disease Control estimates that over a lifetime the costs for a female survivor are \$103,762 and for a male survivor \$23,414. These	Erin Jemison, Director of Public Policy, Utah Domestic Violence Coalition (UDVC) EJemison@UDVC.org

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		include medical costs, loss of employment or interruption of paid work, criminal justice system costs, among others. A coalition of victim service providers and state agencies estimates the annual funding needed as \$310 million ongoing to meet standard of care for all victims of domestic and sexual violence OR \$68 million ongoing to fund the most basic level of services at only the current level of demand for services.	
Housing	\$346 million per year for 10 years	Among extremely low-income renter households, 71% pay more than 50% of their income for housing, which is considered a severe housing burden. \$346 million per year of state funding over the next decade will make it possible to	Utah Housing Coalition Tara Rollins TRollins@UtahHousing.org

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		build affordable housing statewide for people earning less than 50% AMI, based on a state cost share of \$80,000 per unit, and Utah is short 43,253 units. For more information on the current and ongoing needs visit https://nlihc.org/gap/state/ut	
Housing for Seniors	\$67.5 million	\$37.5 million a year for 10 years will fund rehabilitation of 500 units per year at a cost of \$75,000 per unit. If we don't fund preservation of affordable housing for seniors we will lose valuable units. \$30 million per year will make available rental gap funding of \$500 per month for 5,000 units so that seniors can afford to stay in their rented units.	Utah Housing Coalition Director Tara Rollins trollins@utahhousing.org

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		https://www.utahhousing.org/preserving-senior-affordable-housing-report.html https://nyuds.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=b8318f874017488ea9bdd51a296e59ef for senior housing report	
Homeless Services	\$154 million	\$100m in one-time funds to produce 2,000 units of deeply affordable housing \$19m ongoing for tax credits and housing trust fund \$5m to the housing trust fund to produce 1,000 new units of affordable housing over the next 10 years \$30m one-time for projects to eliminate unsheltered homelessness for families with children: The total number of people needing emergency shelter services in	Coalition of Religious Communities - Bill Tibbitts bill@crossroadsurbancenter.org

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		Utah increased by 14% in 2022. For families with children the increase was 33%. This is why, for the first time in over 20 years, families with children were turned away from the family shelter in Midvale during the months of September, October and November of last year because there were not enough beds to meet the need. \$30 million would help purchase a motel to convert into a second family shelter and purchase land that can be dedicated to produce mixed income housing developments that include permanent supportive housing for families with children headed by parents with disabling conditions that have been homeless for six or more months.	
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Air Quality in Schools	\$5 million	Funding to continue the successful implementation of this year's federally-funded program placing air purifiers in every classroom in Utah, which will reduce the risks both from COVID and from Utah's air pollution and is expected to result in improved school performance , even more than standard interventions such as reducing class size by 30%, or "high dose" tutoring. (Source: Utah Physicians for a Healthy Environment)	UPHE Director Jonny Vasic - jvasicuphe@gmail.com
Air Quality: Promote Transit	\$25.5 million	The Utah Transit Authority (UTA) experienced an increase in ridership during Free Fare February in 2022. Tens of thousands of riders, including many new to public transit, enjoyed the services, and stress	Steve Erickson - erickson.steve1@comcast.net

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		on our transportation system and environment was lessened. Governor Cox's Budget Recommendations for FY24 includes a \$25 million, one-year pilot for statewide zero-fare transit. This pilot would include the state's three transit systems that are not currently zero-fare: Cedar Area Transportation System, SunTran, and the Utah Transit Authority. The governor also recommends \$500,000 for a zero fare transit study to analyze the impacts of the pilot. During Free Fare February, 87% of entities that subsidize UTA fares for their users continued paying subsidies to help enable the zero fare period. The	
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		Governor's proposal calls on UTA fare subsidy partners to continue paying subsidies for their users during this one-year pilot period to cover \$13.1 million in additional costs. This pilot will provide Utah families price relief to help offset the burden of gasoline prices, gasoline tax indexing, and inflation, while also allowing researchers to analyze factors related to permanent decisions about zero fare transit	
Improve UTA transit service	\$175.6 million	\$10.9m to match UTA projections to fully supplement free fares for a year. (In all, UTA projected \$35.9 in fare revenue for 2023) \$3.5 million to address UTA's driver shortage (\$20/hr*2,080 hours*60 operators + 40% for benefits,	Curtis Haring, Utah Transit Riders Union curtis.haring@utru.org

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		taxes, etc.) \$30,000 to match CATS (Cedar City's transit system) to fully supplement free fares for a year based on budget projections. \$136,000 to match SunTran (St. George's transit system) to fully supplement free fares for a year based on budget projections. \$159 million to clear UTA's debt to free UTA to expand and improve service. \$2 million to fund a matching grant from the federal government to study the feasibility of a passenger rail route connecting Boise to Las Vegas via Salt Lake and points in between.	
Hunger	\$1 million	It is clear that the state needs to do more in providing	Utahns Against Hunger – Gina Cornia –

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		funding and other resources to help support local community food pantries.	Cornia@uah.org
Utah EITC	\$57 million	Last year Utah became the 31st state with our own Earned Income Tax Credit, but we're one of the few who make it non-refundable, even though over 85% of the value of the federal EITC -- and the key to its poverty-reducing and workforce-enhancing power -- is its refundability. In 2022 under Gov. Youngkin, Virginia made their state EITC refundable. ITEP analysis shows 71% goes to the lowest-earning quintile and nearly all to the lower-income half of Utahns.	Voices for Utah Children – Matthew Weinstein – Matthew@UtahChildren.org
Gov. Cox's proposed refundable tax credit	\$54 million	Utah's Taxpayer Tax Credit shields most low-income workers from the income tax, which is a good thing because it makes	Drew Cooper, United Today Stronger Tomorrow Drew@UnitedToday.org

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		our overall tax system less regressive. Now Gov. Cox is proposing to make it even better by making up to \$250 of this credit refundable.	
Eliminate the sales tax on unprepared food	\$200 million	The food tax is the most regressive tax. One-third of it is paid by the lowest-income half of Utah households, who earn less than a sixth of all Utah income. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service, low-income families pay 36% of their income on food while higher-income families spend only 8%. This is why 37 states do not charge any sales tax on food.	Drew Cooper, United Today Stronger Tomorrow Drew@UnitedToday.org
Save the Great Salt Lake	\$333 million	Gov. Cox is proposing \$133m in new resources to save the Great Salt Lake and \$200 million to help reduce water waste	Utah Rivers Council –Matt Berry Matt@utahrivers.org

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		in agriculture. Source: www.sltrib.com/news/2022/12/30/dear-legislature-heres-2023/	
Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion as it relates to undocumented Utahns		Our public fiscal policies – how we generate and expend public investment dollars – have a direct impact on whether we are widening or narrowing the gaps between different groups in Utah. The Utah Compact on Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion must be more than just words on a page. slchamber.com/public-policy/utah-compact In particular, Utah is home to 95,000 undocumented men, women, and children. They work hard and pay taxes and need and deserve access to the same public services as every other Utahn.	Comunidades Unidas – Brianna Puga – Brianna@CUUtah.org
The economic case		Tax cuts are usually	Univ. of Utah

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against tax cuts		enacted to provide additional stimulus to the economy. Given our very low unemployment rate, along with ongoing inflationary pressures, now is not really the right time for new economic stimulus. The future is uncertain – some economists expect we may face a recession in the coming year, though there's a wide variety of opinions about the likely timing and severity of such a possible event. Additional tax cuts right now won't do much to affect that. However, investing now in the many unmet needs we face, particularly in the areas of water and climate, education, child-care, and the many other needs listed here this morning, will put us in a better position to thrive	Economics Prof. Thomas Maloney PhD maloney@economics.utah.edu
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		whatever the coming years bring us in terms of economic conditions.	
TOTAL		\$5.6 billion – over \$2b more than the amount of "surplus" revenue for FY2024	

The press conference was broadcast live on Facebook: https://fb.watch/ieyT_0Zi14/?mibextid=RUbZ1f



Media coverage:

- [KJZZ: Local organizations oppose statewide tax cuts, call for investments in Utah's future instead](#)
- [Deseret News: Time to invest more in education, housing, water and other areas, group says](#)
- [KUTV-2: Local organizers oppose tax cuts, call for investments in Utah's future instead](#)
- [KSL: Don't cut taxes, advocacy groups urge Utah lawmakers. Here's why.](#)
- [UtahPolicy.com](#)

Additional one-pagers distributed by some of the coalition members:

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- Circles Salt Lake: [Background about Circles](#) and [one-pager about benefits cliffs](#)
- Transit: [Utah Transit Riders Union info](#) and [one-pager about free-fare transit](#)
- Community Action Partnership of Utah [one-pager about rural Utah's needs](#)
- [Child care one-pager](#) from UtahCareforKids.org
- [Housing affordability one-pager](#) from Utah Housing Coalition