

# Final General Session Update from Senator Aaron Osmond

## March 22, 2014

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

The 2014 General Legislative Session is now complete! Each session has its unique challenges and difficult policy issues to face. This session was no exception. It was a unique and moving experience to consider that I represented 95,000 people each time I voted. I take this role very seriously. I am truly grateful for the opportunity and honor to represent you. While we may not always agree on every issue or on every vote, my goal as your state Senator is and always has been to be accessible, to listen carefully, and to be transparent in all my votes and actions. I want to express my appreciation for all those that came to see me, that called me, and that emailed me during the session. Your input was critical to the work I accomplished on your behalf. Finally, thank you for the many, many emails of support and encouragement during the session. It was both uplifting and appreciated! Thank you!

### Here is a List of My Bills That Passed

This year I had quite a large legislative load (due to several policy projects I have been researching for several years that finally came together during this session). I discussed all but one of these bills during my quarterly meeting prior to the session. The last bill below (SB 244) was brought to me by Salt Lake County to help them with a requested change to tax policy. Here is the list of bills I actually passed:

1. **SB 31 – State Agency Reporting.** This bill creates a constituent annual format and topics for each state agency to report their operational and financial metrics to the Legislature.
2. **SB 39 – Home School Amendments.** This bill removes state requirements on parents who chose to homeschool their children. Parents no longer have to follow state curriculum and school hour requirements. This bill also removes the requirement to annually sign an affidavit of homeschooling (changing to one-time filing). This bill also identifies a new placement process for all students who transfer back into public education full time.
3. **SB 101 – Public Education Human Resource Management Act Amendments.** This bill modifies the law I passed in the 2012 session to allow for 1 additional year before the full state school system is required to convert to the new rating and ranking evaluation system for teachers and administrators (to allow for more training and development time on the new system).
4. **SB 103 - Local Control of Classroom Time.** Under this bill, each school district may now use up to 32 hours or 4 days of school each year for the purpose of teacher professional development or teacher preparation time without impact to a school's funding.
5. **SB 104 - Improvement of Reading Instruction.** Under this bill, we add an additional \$100k of funding for the U of U Reading Clinic (providing teacher professional development and individual student intervention for children and Teachers in K-3). It requires the use technology in assisting with reading remediation.
6. **SB 109 - Radon Testing for Home Purchase.** Under this bill, we funded \$25k for the purpose of an electronic awareness campaign to ensure Utahans are aware of the risks of Radon poisoning in Utah and how to remediate it.
7. **SB 110 - Guardianship Costs for Parents of Disabled Adult Child.** This bill requires the court system to enable the process of Legal Guardianship through an online application without the need for attorney's.
8. **SB 122 - Parent Accountability in Public Education.** Under this bill, parents are giving a "Bill of Rights" as to the areas where they can expect a "reasonable expectation" of accommodation relative to their child's education within public education. 10 rights are expressly outlined.

9. **SB 131 - Student Leadership Grant.** Under this bill, we re-authorize the grant program for schools to build or buy a “student leadership” program for implementation at their local schools. We secured another year of funding for \$250k. The program still requires a match of any funds by the local school district.
10. **SB 149 - Drowsy Driving Act.** This bill established the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of August as “Drowsy Driver Awareness Week” for the state to promote awareness of the dangers of drowsy driving.
11. **SCR 1 - Resolution Recognizing the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Including “In God We Trust” in the Pledge.** Under this resolution we officially recognize that it has been 60 years since Congress approved the inclusion of the words “In God We Trust” in the Pledge of Allegiance of the United States.
12. **SB 215 - School Security.** Under this bill (which I worked on with students from Copper Hills High School) we are changed law to allow School leaders to contact students who are off campus for release time when there is a school shut down or other safety issue.
13. **SB 244- Property Tax Amendments.** Under this bill, the county and state can now send you property tax notices via email, as long as you authorize it and keep the email address valid.

### **Governor Must Now Decide on Final Passage of Bills**

April 2nd is the last day the Governor may sign or veto the bills we have sent to him. If for some reason, the legislature does not agree with his decision, we could call a veto-override session, but it would need to convene by the 12th of May. Fortunately, I doubt that we will have a veto-override session this year. The normal effective date for bills passed this session will be May 13th. Occasionally, a bill will have a different effective date written into it or specify that it is effective immediately upon the receipt of the Governor's signature, but that is not typical.

### **Voter Turn Out and Various Bills Passed to Improve It**

Hopefully each of you had the opportunity to attend your local Caucus Meeting this last week. I admit that I was a bit disappointed at the low voter turn-out that I saw at our precinct meeting that night. Part of the goal of SB 54 (the Count My Vote compromise bill) was to increase voter participation. Here are a few other bills that I hope will increase voter turn-out:

- HB 156: Each election, some voters are turned away at the polls because their previous registration cannot be found or verified. This bill would create a pilot program to see if the use of provisional ballots will work for both registration and a ballot, once qualifications are verified.
- SB 245: This bill would allow disabled Utahns to vote online as some members of the military who are serving abroad currently do.
- HB 410: This bill would make online voting an option for everyone by the 2016 elections.

### **More on SB 54 – The Count My Vote Compromise Bill**

Some people saw SB 54 as a compromise, others see it as a win for the Caucus system, and some see it as the future demise of the Caucus system. Here is a link to an article from Senator Reid on the potential future effects of SB 54. As I study this issue more each day, I believe that many parts of his forecast may come true. Here is the article:

<http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865598384/SB54-will-politically-and-culturally-reconstruct-Utah.html>. I welcome your thoughts on this issue as we move forward.

### **The Caucus System Overview**

If you are one of those who is not familiar with the caucus system, here is a brief explanation. The caucus system is the process Utah political parties use to select their candidates for the General Election ballot. The caucus meeting is held in neighborhoods and attended by members of a like political party. At that meeting, the neighborhood members elect delegates to represent them in the candidate selection process.

It then becomes the job of those delegates to thoroughly vet each party candidate and select on behalf of their neighborhood, which candidate they feel would best represent the needs and values of their neighbors. Ideally, a delegate should find some way to report back to their neighbors as they vet and make the decision on the candidate they will support. The second job of the delegates is attending the party's convention where they vote on the candidates that will later be on the ballot.

### **Why I support the Caucus System**

One of the reasons I support the caucus system is the face-to-face contact that is required of the candidates with their delegates. Delegates usually ask very hard and meaningful questions. I must be well prepared and prove by my actions/votes and by my words that I am true to the person I said I would be. I have found our delegates keep me very accountable to the people I represent.

### **The Final Budget**

There was a great deal of time this past week working on the final details of the budget. It was an arduous process to say the least, but balancing the budget is critical for our state to function as efficiently and frugally as possible and one of the reasons I am glad I live in Utah.

We had copies of the updated budgets to examine for several days during the last week. Senator Hillyard pointed out that it takes only a few minutes to pass these budget bills, but the bills represent literally hundreds of hours of work, thought and deliberation by both legislators and staff. Our goal as we assessed last year's expenditures and then created the upcoming year's budget was to look at where funds were spent successfully rather than how much was given to whom. The assessment process we followed at the beginning of the session helped a great deal with our final decisions.

### **Comparison to the Federal Budget Process**

The last time the U.S. House, Senate and the President agreed on a budget to fund an entire fiscal year was 1998. During those past 16 years, in order to keep the nation running, Congress has passed over 90 different "continuing resolutions." A continuing resolution is a stop-gap bill that maintains funding at pre-approved levels and eliminates the need to examine or debate the details of the expenditures. Congress uses this trick about every 6 months.

When the House and Senate cannot agree on the terms of a continuing resolution, the federal government shuts down. The most recent resolution was passed just 2 months ago to keep government agencies running until a spending bill could be signed by the President. He signed that spending bill a few days later and allocated \$1.1 trillion to fund federal government agencies, but that funding will only last until October, after that, if tradition holds, they will probably need to pass another continuing resolution. One other clarifying point: a spending bill is NOT a budget. It is just an allocation of funds, frequently with bits of unrelated legislation rolled into an omnibus bill.

### **Transparency is Key to Utah's Budget Success**

Another thing I appreciate about Utah's budgeting process is the transparent way the budget is presented in law. For example, HB 8 clearly shows budget increases and decreases for state agencies and higher education institutions. It also authorizes state agency fees, so you can look up things like the amount legally required for real estate education certificates or the exact amounts that may be charged for a child's health insurance program. Like any other piece of legislation, the House and Senate versions of the budget must match and then be signed by the Governor. That final budget bill is HB 2. In that bill you will be able to find, line by line the states capital outlay, budget increases and decreases and even employee compensation levels. It is very clear and transparent.

### **New Bills to Improve our Budgeting Process**

Two bills we discussed this session that will help even more with our states' budgeting process are HJR11, Joint Rules Resolution on Executive Appropriations Committee Budget Responsibilities, and HB311, Budgeting Amendments. These bills will help the Legislature better allocate funding and prepare for economic up and down swings. This will ensure that we do not overspend in upswing periods and then be required to drastically cut budgets in a downswing. These two bills would direct the Office of the Legislative Fiscal Analyst and the Executive Appropriations Committee to start tracking economic trends and report those trends to legislative leadership each year.

### **On-going Funding versus One-Time Funding**

To have "X" funds available in a given year and then spend to the "X" level without considering that next year the state may only have "Y" level funds available is not prudent. In general, Utah has adopted fiscal principles that match one-time funding sources with one-time needs and on-going funding sources with on-going requests and needs. If you were to liken this to your home budget, it would be like paying your mortgage, car payment and insurances with your regular paycheck and purchasing a cruise trip or new furniture with a year-end bonus. And just as within your household budget, there will always be more needs as well as many more wants than available funds.

### **Unresolved Bills and Policy Issues will Now Go To Interim Meetings**

There are many issues that we did not have time to address this session, or that failed because they were simply not ready to be made into law. Many of those issues will be brought back next year during the 2015 session. Legislators can open bill files and start working on drafting bills starting May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

**Important Note:** I will begin discussing policy issues and my own proposed legislation for 2015 with you in my regular quarterly meetings starting in May. If you have concerns or would like me to consider legislation critical for our state or district for next session, the earlier in the year you contact me the better. Many people do not realize just how long it takes to create solid legislation.

### **Utah's Unemployment Rate Now Lowest in Over 5 Years!**

Utah's Unemployment Rate Dropping One great report we just received from the Department of Workforce Services is that Utah's unemployment rate is now lower than it had been before the Great Recession began more than five years ago. Our last reported rate was 4.1%, the national rate during the same time was 6.6%! Congratulations to Utah!

### **Thanks to My Intern – Cody Garcia**

Finally, I just wanted to share a public thank you to my intern Cody Garcia for his fabulous work during the session. As you know, we do not have individual staff assigned to us, so interns are critical to our success. Without Cody I would collapsed under the pressure of my legislative load. He was both professional and efficient. He kept me focused, prepared responses to my constituents via phone and email, and kept me on schedule to all of my meetings. He was an ally, a friend, and a supporter all in one. I am sincerely grateful for the opportunity to have had him at my side this year. Thank you Cody!

Again, thank you for the honor and the opportunity to serve you. It is truly a privilege that I take very seriously.

I look forward to talking with you in person soon!

Sincerely,

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