

# Monthly Update & Review - Senator Aaron Osmond

## June 2014

Saturday, July 5, 2014

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

### **Celebrating the Fourth of July**

I hope you all took advantage of the opportunity to celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> of July in a meaningful way. We are so very blessed to live in this wonderful country where freedom abounds. We are so uniquely blessed to worship God as we desire, to pursue education, to pursue our interests and hobbies as we wish, to actively participate in our government, to speak our minds, and to challenge what happens in our society. All this we enjoy without threat of force or undue governmental interference in our lives.

I am so very grateful to be a citizen of this great country. I honor those men and women of both prior generations and those currently serving who ensure these freedoms and make this country possible. Thank you to all those who have served and now serve this great country. I thank you for your sacrifice and for your service. Most of all I thank God for His many blessings for each of us and in preserving this great nation. May we all work together to preserve this nation for our children and our children's children.

### **June 2014 – The Month in Review**

Below you will find a quick summary of the political happenings in our area and at the state level that I believe affect our District that you need to know or understand. Please feel free to reach out to me and discuss personally if you have any questions or concerns that you want to review with me. While my time is limited, if you have an urgent question or concern, please send me an email with a clear subject line that lets me know you need a quick call or a time line when I need to respond. I will get back to you as soon as possible.

### **My Take on the Proposed Jordan School District Split**

Many of you have reached out to me to know my opinion about South Jordan City's potential ballot initiative to split off from the Jordan School District. Here is a brief summary of my thoughts and opinions relative to this potential action:

- 1) Many citizens as well as municipal leaders in South Jordan are concerned about the planning, funding, construction, maintenance, and future usage of our schools and district facilities in the Jordan School District, specifically in South Jordan. This has been the primary driver behind the discussion of splitting the Jordan School District, again.
- 2) These concerns are not limited to just the city of South Jordan. Other municipal leaders (such as West Jordan) share these concerns and are also serious about pursuing their own split from the Jordan School District if South Jordan City chooses to move forward with the split.
- 3) In my opinion, a split of the Jordan School District would result in more negatives than positives at this time. I believe that the immediate financial impacts of a split could be very serious. This is especially true for those who live within cities where there is a minimal commercial tax base to carry the additional cost burden of a split (such as Herriman).
- 4) We all recognize that as a result of our growth and the need for new school buildings, every city and every property owner in the Jordan School District area may soon have higher property taxes to cover those construction costs (if, when, and how much are still to be determined). Unfortunately, I believe that a split of the Jordan School District would result in even higher taxes for the smaller cities who will be left to carry the burden of their own growth and a new district structure.

- 5) As such, I do not support a split of the Jordan School District at this time. While the City of South Jordan has a statutory right to bring this issue to the ballot and pursue the split based on the results of their own feasibility study, I believe that such a move should also be considered in the context of the financial impact it will have on the entire surrounding area.
- 6) Fortunately, I know that municipal leaders, our district staff, and our Jordan School District Board are now working together on a meaningful compromise that will modify and improve how the district is run, ensure greater transparency within the district on building projects, create a stronger partnership with city leaders in the planning and construction of new schools, and most importantly, improve the quality of academic outcomes within our local public education system for the benefit of our kids.

I encourage all of you to reach out to your city and school district leaders and encourage them to complete this compromise and avoid a potential school district split.

### **June Interim Meetings**

Even though our meeting schedule is less intense than it is during a regular session, there is still much to do and many things to discuss, consider and decide. There were several meetings held in June in addition to the regular Interim meetings.

### ***Commission on Federalism***

On June 3, the Commission on Federalism heard reviews of recent case law related to state sovereignty in public lands; the Affordable Care Act; the legal recognition of the definition of marriage; and an update on the possibility of states calling for an Article V Convention. If you would like to listen to these discussions here is the link: [http://utahlegislature.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=2&clip\\_id=17574&meta\\_id=234945](http://utahlegislature.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=2&clip_id=17574&meta_id=234945). The next time they will meet there will be a report on where the courts are on public prayer and how those opinions will affect our state's jurisdiction.

### ***Health Reform Task Force***

The Health Reform Task Force also met early in June. The task force received a report on the state's small-employer health insurance exchange and discussed the possibility of expanding the program to cover companies with more employees. Here is a link to the information legislators were given about Avenue H (our state's health care exchange): <http://le.utah.gov/interim/2014/pdf/00003404.pdf>. There was also a very interesting discussion about the employee mandates and penalties required by the Affordable Care Act. Here is the material that went along with that discussion: <http://le.utah.gov/interim/2014/pdf/00003440.pdf> and here is a link to the meeting if you would like to listen to the full conversation: [http://utahlegislature.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=2&clip\\_id=17576&meta\\_id=23498](http://utahlegislature.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=2&clip_id=17576&meta_id=23498).

### ***Expanding Medicaid – a Challenging Decision***

Part of the ongoing discussion of this task force will be how or if the state should expand Medicaid. That decision needs to be a long-term policy decision, not just a quick fix solution. There are still many unknowns about what the real costs of federal health care will be both to individuals and the states. The plan the Governor has proposed is a good plan and several others plans have been presented as well, but we need to be absolutely certain that we are committing to the BEST possible plan for Utah. Here is a video describing the current options that have been proposed thus far: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Om4HY6defw&feature=youtu.be>.

While one of these options may be at least part of our best solution, there are many concerns, like those addressed in this article, that raise a great deal of apprehension about the rising costs that states will become responsible for as companies are incentivized to discontinue offering health care as a regular benefit to their employees: [http://images.politico.com/global/2014/04/30/health\\_care\\_4-29\\_3.pdf](http://images.politico.com/global/2014/04/30/health_care_4-29_3.pdf). It's worth a careful read.

The Medicaid decision needs to be made with as much information and deliberation as possible and therefore is **not** likely to be taken up in a special session. I am carefully considering this issue and invite you to share your opinions with me. Right now my concern over our future financial liability in expanding Medicaid, in the context of the financial instability of our Federal Government, blocks my support of any kind of expansion (despite the potential benefits to many needed citizens).

### ***Prison Relocation Commission***

The Prison Relocation Commission also met and was given prospective criteria options for evaluating the land for the new prison location; the necessary selection process for the land; and an estimated timeline for accomplishing that evaluation and selection process. There was also a presentation from the Department of Corrections on the same issue. Here is the material they considered: <http://le.utah.gov/interim/2014/pdf/00003545.pdf>.

### ***Education Task Force***

**I serve on this task force.** The Education Task Force also met outside of interim day. In this meeting, we discussed accountability measures for principals and had a long discussion about various legislative options for increasing or redirecting revenue for public education. Here is a link to that meeting if you would like to hear our full discussion: [http://utahlegislature.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=2&clip\\_id=17622&meta\\_id=235191](http://utahlegislature.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=2&clip_id=17622&meta_id=235191).

### ***Health and Human Services Committee Meeting***

During our June regular Interim meetings the Health and Human Service Committee discussed converting a pilot program that funds hearing aids for children who are under three years old to an ongoing appropriation. The committee's agenda also covered the prescription drug abuse program and how the new federal regulations would affect e-cigarette retailers in Utah.

### ***Natural Resources Committee***

Federal impacts were also discussed in the Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment Committee. The director of the State Bureau of Land Management, the Lieutenant Governor and several other supervisors and directors from various agencies relayed to the committee how federal land ownership and the actions of the federal agencies that regulate those lands affect Utah. One of the major problems is the conflicting data and information that is generated by federal vs. state and local sources. Kathleen Clarke, Director of the Public Lands Policy Coordination Office, updated the legislators on the compelling need for the testimonies and depositions that they are collecting on the existence of more than 400 unmapped but existing public roads. Here is a link to the discussion if you are interested: [http://utahlegislature.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=2&clip\\_id=17606&meta\\_id=235045](http://utahlegislature.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=2&clip_id=17606&meta_id=235045).

The committee also discussed the progress of the master plan for the State Fair Park area. The goal, of course, is to determine the highest and best use of the land, but at the same time factor in public use verses market-value use.

**Note:** I personally believe that the State Fair ought to continue but should be relocated to a more central location in the state (such as Herriman).

### ***Education Committee***

The Education Committee listened to a panel of teachers who gave suggestions and their opinions as to what the Legislature could best do to help promote learning for students. Here is a link to their statements: [http://utahlegislature.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=2&clip\\_id=17614&meta\\_id=235087](http://utahlegislature.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=2&clip_id=17614&meta_id=235087).

### ***Political Subdivisions Committee***

**I serve on this Committee.** We had a discussion regarding a public-private partnership called UTOPIA that would provide broadband services to parts of the state. The main issue discussed was whether all citizens should pay the monthly fee as part of their utility bill regardless of whether they use the service. It was an important and interesting discussion about the difference between taxes and fees. Here is a link to that meeting:

[http://utahlegislature.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=2&clip\\_id=17615&meta\\_id=235089](http://utahlegislature.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=2&clip_id=17615&meta_id=235089).

### ***Transportation Committee***

The Transportation Committee heard reports from UTA, the Driver License Division and UDOT on their emerging issues and their long-term plans to address those issues. Here is more detail on those discussions:

[http://utahlegislature.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=2&clip\\_id=17607&meta\\_id=235098](http://utahlegislature.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=2&clip_id=17607&meta_id=235098).

### ***Executive Appropriations Meeting***

Here is a link to the budget information that was given to the Executive Appropriations Committee this month:

<http://le.utah.gov/lfa/LFADocs.jsp?month=6>. The numbers show that we can expect a surplus of between \$25 and \$150 million for the end of the fiscal year. The committee also heard the reports from several successful pilot programs.

### **Our Next Interim Meeting**

Our next Interim day will be **Wednesday, July 16**. Committee schedules and agendas will be available soon on the legislative website under the calendar tab <http://le.utah.gov/>. If you can't be there in person, you can listen live to the meetings on-line at the links provided on the site.

### **Business Success in Utah – a Good Sign for Entrepreneurs and Small Business!**

Utah continues to excel as a leader in business, especially for entrepreneurs. Recently, business owners in each state were asked how their state and local government regulations helped or hurt their entrepreneurial ability. In this study Utah was ranked as the friendliest state for small businesses. <http://www.thumbtack.com/survey#/2014/1/states>.

Utah business owners have rated their state in the top five every year this survey has run. Also this month, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation again ranked Utah as one of the best performing states, finishing third overall. <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/print/865605098/Utah-economy-and-business-policy-get-high-marks.html>.

### **Utah Transparency versus Other States**

While our state is far from perfect, this article shows that Utah is among the "least corrupt states" in the nation. <http://www.govtech.com/budget-finance/What-Corrupt-States-Spend-Their-Money-On.html>. Just as the article points out, our contributing factors, such as high proportions of state funds allocated to education and social services and our continuous and consistent internal auditing process gives us this spot. Along the same lines, a new Gallup poll found that Utah was one of only 6 states where more than 70% of residents placed a "great deal/fair amount" of trust in their state's elected officials. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/168251/illinois-residents-least-trusting-state-government.aspx>. I think a lot of this trust is due to transparency, accessibility and the fact that we are a part-time legislature.

### **Transparency in Government – Thoughts from Senator Henderson**

Here is a clip of Senator Henderson discussing the importance of transparency in government and the cautious attitude we should take with our acceptance of federal funds. <http://www.frequency.com/video/gopac-emerging-leader-utah-state-senator/171690488/-/5-1745>

### **Getting Involved In the Political Process**

Here are some useful tips from Senator Todd Weiler on how to get involved in the legislative process: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZrRjypaWM&feature=youtu.be>. As he points out, involvement begins now. Frequently, when constituents come to me with problems during general session time, there is simply not enough time to adequately address their concern at the time our general session begins.

Well, that's a lot for now. I look forward to talking with you soon!

Sincerely,

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