

Legislative Update from Senator Aaron Osmond

June and July 2015

July 12, 2015

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

I hope you had a wonderful 4th of July holiday and enjoyed the opportunity to celebrate the freedom we enjoy in our great country! We are all truly blessed to be citizens of the United States of America!

In just 6 months the 2016 Legislative Session will be upon us! Even though we are not currently in session, my colleagues and I, both in the Senate and in the House, are working hard to prepare for that next session.

Each month we meet and hold our "Interim Committee Meetings". On interim day each month, members of the legislature meet in our assigned committees to study important topics such as Medicaid Expansion or Utah's Water Needs or Charter School Funding, and when the legislature reconvenes in January of next year, we'll report our findings.

Those of you who like to follow our work on your behalf in real-time will be interested in a minor schedule change we just approved. Starting next month, the interim schedule will be as follows:

8:30 a.m. to 11 a.m. -- Morning Committee Meetings

1:15 to 3:45 p.m. -- Afternoon Committee Meetings

4 p.m. to 5 p.m. -- Senate Advice and Consent

You can see all upcoming meetings at www.le.utah.gov. You can also track and research bills from previous sessions amongst many other useful things on the website, it is a great resource for everything and anything to do with the State Legislature. You can follow the policy discussion through a number of social media sites listed on SenateCloud.com

Thank You for Attending My Quarterly Policy Planning Meeting

I want to take a moment and thank those that attended my recent Quarterly Policy Planning Meeting. I am so impressed by the number of people (23 in total) who spent nearly 3 hours with me to discuss key bills and how I voted on those bills during the 2015 Session, as well as review several of my proposed bills for the 2016 session. I will be holding 2 more of these planning meetings before the 2016 Session. I hope those of you who could not attend will be able to join me at a future meeting. It is in these meetings where I am held accountable for my work and where I can understand and discuss how my constituents really feel about the issues facing Utah.

Big Issues in Utah Being Discussed

A lot of big things are going on in the world of Utah Politics as of late. A few of the more noteworthy issues being discussed are outlined below:

Moving the State Prison

The Prison Relocation Commission held a public hearing on two weeks ago. Four sites are currently being considered (two in western Utah County, one in Tooele County, and one in northwest Salt Lake County). Once we have all the data, the commission will make a recommendation and the legislature will vote. I'm hearing a number of people say that it would be better to keep the prison where it is. The short response to this is it that we have been given evidence that it will cost more to rebuild the prison at the current site than it would be to build it on a new site. In addition, we have been given evidence that the economic benefit to the state if we were to retool that acreage would also be significant.

I am not yet sold that these benefits are all real. I also have many concerns about the prison move (from cost to the tax payers to the loss/impact to the volunteer base to support the prison). Another concern I have is ensuring that any future economic benefit from the prison move would actually benefit all Utahns (not just those residents in the area). As such I am looking into legislation that would place all new property developed in that area under a "centrally assessed" zone so that any new property tax benefits would be equally distributed to all school districts in the state. More to come on that later this year.

Supreme Court Watch

The Supreme Court of the United States issued some key decisions, two of which have particularly significant impact here in Utah. The first, Obergefell v. Hodges, has established that states are now all required to issue marriage licenses to same sex couples and that states now have to recognize same sex marriages performed in a different state. The second is King v. Burwell, which upheld the payment of Tax Credit subsidies to individuals/employers in states with federally established health care exchanges (Utah is one of these states). More to come on both these important rulings later this year from a Utah perspective.

Medicaid Expansion

You might remember we could not come to agreement during the session on Medicaid Expansion. A group of key legislators are meeting informally on how we might expand Medicaid to cover more people in need. Their proposal - if they can strike the right compromise - will be a balancing act between our desire to support those who truly need help and the necessity of running our state budget in a way that is fiscally responsible, sustainable over the long term, and fair. When they have a bill ready, we'll run it through the full committee process as a legislature for final review and approval.

Senate Advice and Consent

Last month, the Senate met officially for our Advice and Consent role, where we confirm Governor Herbert's appointments for various Utah State Government posts. Many of these appointments are thoroughly vetted in a confirmation committees before being brought to the Senate floor for consent.

Here are a few of the people who were confirmed. I thought you would like to know:

- Former state senator Patricia Jones was appointed to replace Bonnie Jean Beasley as a member of the State Board of Regents.
- Jordan White was appointed to the Public Service Commission, replacing Ron Allen. White is currently the legal counsel to the Public Service Commission.
- Rebecca L. Rockwell was appointed to replace D'Arcy Dixon Pignanelli as a member of the Utah State Tax Commission. As an associate general counsel to the Office of Legislative Research and General Counsel, Rockwell provided legal counsel to the Revenue and Taxation Interim Committee and Utah Tax Review Commission.
- Alan A. Matheson was appointed to replace Amanda Smith as the Executive Director of the Department of Environmental Quality. Since 2011, Matheson served as Governor Herbert's senior environmental advisor.

A complete list of confirmations can be found at our Senate Site: www.senatesite.com

June Interim Committee Summary

Here is a quick overview of some committee meetings held during the June Interim. I am assigned to the Education Interim and to the Economic Development and Workforce Services committee:

Education Interim Committee

The Education Interim Committee considered the possibility of reviving some of the professional development programs that were phased out during the recession. Experts testified that a lack of support is one of the reasons why teachers leave the teaching profession.

Professional development programs can help provide this kind of support, but would require additional funding. One way to provide this funding is to increase the Weighted Per Pupil spending (WPU). The Education Committee thought it was better for schools to earn the funding after meeting certain qualifications. Here's more on this from the Deseret News:

<http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865630914/Lawmakers-push-to-set-aside-more-money-for-teacher-training.html>).

Economic Development and Workforce Services Committee

This committee reviewed the welfare benefits administered by the Department of Workforce Services (both State and Federal programs). The committee also heard testimony on the status and improvements within the Department of Workforce Services, relative to the critical findings of the last audit. Finally the committee heard important testimony from the Intergenerational Poverty

Commission on their proposed 5 and 10 year plan. This plan will be the basis of future legislative action. I will be personally working with DWS leaders and Commission leaders to push forward new legislation that will begin to address ways to actively reduce intergeneration poverty in Utah.

Here is a link to the audio of that section of our meeting:

http://utahlegislature.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=2&clip_id=18990&meta_id=239214

Executive Appropriations Committee

For your information, The Executive Appropriations Committee met on Tuesday prior to our regular interim day meetings in June. The committee received a revenue update and fiscal health check-up from our Legislative Fiscal Analyst's Office. The good news:

- New tax revenue estimates show that we'll wrap up this fiscal year (2015, ending on June 30th) with between a \$20 million and \$180 million surplus.
- Income tax collections are up by 10.2 percent. Corporate income tax collections are up 20.4 percent. The Result: The Education Fund (made up of personal and corporate income taxes) will exceed estimates by somewhere between \$60 and \$180 Million.
- Our General Fund (made up mostly of sales tax) may end up down somewhere around \$40 million dollars, but because we have about \$120 million in reserves, we'll be just fine, and address it during the upcoming session. It pays to save!
- Utah Policy Daily wrote a solid article about our fiscal state: Here's a link for those of you who would like to dive in a little deeper: <http://utahpolicy.com/index.php/features/today-at-utah-policy/6018-utah-s-budget-picture-improves-again>.
- The Office of the Legislative Fiscal Analyst puts out a Fiscal Highlights letter every month. If you're interested in taking a scrutinizing squint, have a look: <http://le.utah.gov/lfa/LFADocs.jsp?month=6&pubid=4816>

Conclusion

Thanks for following me along in my legislative journey. I am now in my 5th year serving as your representative in the Utah State Senate. I am truly honored to serve you. My goal is to continually keep you informed about the work we do on your behalf at the Capitol – likewise, please keep in touch with me – I'd love to hear your insights and opinions and concerns.

Staying Connected

You can connect with me at the Utah Senate wherever you live on social media by visiting our cloud site at www.senatecloud.com. We're on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, and **the list goes on...**

I can also be reached by email at aosmond@le.utah.gov or by phone at (801) 888-8742. You're also welcome to join me at the Capitol on Interim day. Our next interim day is next week on Wednesday, July 15th. I'd love to see you there!

If you'd like to meet with me in person outside of interim or the legislative session, you can reach Ian Robertson, my Legislative Coordinator at irobertsonslc@gmail.com or 801-888-8742, He'll help us get in touch, set up a meeting or answer any question you might have.

I'm truly grateful for the opportunity you've given me to serve in this capacity. We live in a unique and special place. Thank you for all you do to make Utah the best state in the nation – and thanks for paying attention.

Until next time,

Sincerely,

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