

GENERAL SESSION

March 7, 2007

Little America Hotel Ballroom 505 S. Main, Salt Lake City, Utah

**Speakers: Sen. Carlene Walker (R) Dist. 8, SL County (Cottonwood Heights)
Rep. Carol Moss (D) Dist. 37, SL County (Holladay); Asst. Minority Whip**

After the Pledge of Allegiance, given by **Dr. Ruth Lundgren, WSLC President (2005-2007) Suzanne Merrill** brought the meeting to order. She welcomed all in attendance and recognized special guests before turning time over to the speakers.

Sen. Walker, beginning her review of the legislative session, quipped it would be difficult to consolidate "45 days of hyperactivity" down to a few minutes. The legislature had \$1.7 billion to allocate this year. Where did it go? There was a \$220 million tax cut, plus various benefits.

Education was the highest priority, with \$.5 billion of new money flowing into it (including a \$2,500 raise + \$1,000 bonus for teachers). There was a 7% WPU funding increase, \$50 million for classroom technology and \$10 million for miscellaneous classroom needs. She noted that over the last two years, there has been a 36.9% increase in Utah's educational spending and that \$1 billion has gone into class size reduction since 1994. A long-overdue audit is now being conducted to determine where that money has gone.

CHIP was a high priority with the legislature; there will be 1,200 more children covered this year. Optional all-day kindergarten passed, as did four bills dealing with identity theft. She pointed out that some Social Security numbers in Utah have been found to be in use by as many as 37 people per number.

Sen. Walker has researched school vouchers for two years and supports them, noting they are a work in progress and need to be monitored carefully. She said voucher money will not come from the funds

normally earmarked for education. Home schools are not included in the allocation of voucher money.

Rep. Moss said that she had been a teacher for 33 years before deciding to run for office and she still misses teaching. She joked that her years of teaching were good preparation for the squabbling that can occur in the legislature. The sessions can occasionally produce a certain amount of rancor, but that comes with a two-party system. She believes they are all interested in working for the good of our state.

We need to maintain spending in education and do even better in per pupil spending. She was gratified by the higher education appropriations, and particularly pleased with the higher teachers' salaries, saying Utah has needed this to compete with neighboring states. An opponent of school vouchers, she also encouraged people to get involved in the referendum process.

She was pleased several school bills did not pass, including the '65% solution' bill (which would have taken away more local control) and also the tax form 'check box' for education. We should hold neighborhood schools more accountable and not try to micro-manage from the legislature.

In Health & Human Services, there were some

disappointments, but also some successes. There was an extra \$2 million from the tobacco settlement, so CHIP is fully funded. Medicaid, vision & dental were well-funded. However, traffic safety funding was inadequate. As a case in point,

she mentioned texting while driving (TWD) is a new, but rapidly growing problem on our highways, and it needs to be addressed.

Reported by Pam Grange

Elizabeth Hindley read this year's Legislative Wrap-Up poem*, which was followed by entertainment from **Keller's Blue Grass Band**.

*** 2006-2007 Utah Legislature
Life Celebrated**

While the rest of the country
changed their legislators,
(Out with the old – In with the new)
Utah voted to keep all those
we had complained about,
Although they almost lost. Whew!

All backs of the leggings were suddenly itchy,
so they were promptly scratched.
And all wishes of the governor were
somehow devotedly hatched.

They said they "vote their divine conscience,
regardless of the people's choice."
No wonder citizens don't go to the polls.
Only petitions give them a voice.

Ethics in politics was static.
They didn't give up much – Just added
another disclosure rule.
But they were instructed to give up
free dinners & Jazz tickets.
(Hee, hee. How cruel!)

Seventy percent of the electorate said, "No!"
To a soccer team, complete with new facilities.
State government said, "The people are wrong!
We'll have it anyway – to the best of our abilities."

"We will not raise taxes!
No tax money will be used!"
Well, where does the state get money,
except from the people who refused?

A tax is a tax is a tax,
and a tax by any other name would smell –
But not as bad as the
sports promoter's promises, by Hell!

How much money is the soccer club
really going to cost us? And for how long?
Tomorrow, will the kids of today

(who will bear that cost)
Say we were wrong?

On soccer, hot waste, and school vouchers,
they refused to take our advice.
Now, We the People feel betrayed
and fear we will pay a very high price.

After hearing our cries and receiving our
people's petitions about Divine Strake,
we were quickly given a reprieve.
Washington listened to us – We do count.
What a break!

We said "No!" to giving complete autonomy to the
largest radioactive dump in our state.
They wanted no interference from the governor or
the leggings – Now that could have sealed our fate!

The people's representatives
should handle this, for sure.
If they don't want to follow our rules,
Just show them the door!

Private entities should not make their own rules
when it involves the people's health;
Not when all it means is lowering
the company's projected increased wealth.

The governor can claim executive privilege
for the good of the people, anytime.
Then, if we need federal help,
he has a direct line to Washington – That's fine!

It's his job to keep things under control.
Somebody has to do it.
So, to Kermit the Frog, we say,
if you think it's hard being green,
try being Utah's governor –
There's really nothing to it!

But, let us give credit where credit is due.

They passed many bills which pleased us.
In fact, quite a few.

Making a two-year college
into a four-year university
Will take the stress off U of U,
for a certainty.

Giving raises & bonuses to teachers
was long overdue.
No one complained about that –
Or did you?

All Utah government workers
have lived on promises long enough.
They, too, deserved to share in good fortune,
and all that stuff.

A full-day kindergarten
seems to be a good combination,
As long as it isn't used
for a babysitting situation.

School vouchers passed, after X number of years.
Some groups cheered; others were left in tears.

A tax break on food was welcomed by all.
But next year, tax collection
takes a \$60 million fall.

Kitty Kaplan presented the President's Pin to outgoing WSLC President **Suzanne Merrill**, who responded with a parting message to the members.

Kathryn Rowley presided over the Installation of Officers for the 2007-2009 Biennium, after which **Kitty Kaplan**, newly installed WSLC President, responded.

For this year only, dental, vision & health care
was mandated for the poor.
What a pity and a pittance.
We could have done much more.

Transportation fared very well.
It's something we all use.
Not spending the surplus here
is something we'd never excuse.

The Immigration Bill was tabled early and fast.
Much to the chagrin of those who wanted it passed.

Why didn't the animal anti-cruelty bill pass?
Ask any pet owner. They're only human, yes?

For the eyes of the legislators, only:

Here's to the guys & gals on the hill.
If they won't do it, no one will.
When they pass the entire
bills we admire,
We'll give them a medal. We will!

Elizabeth Hindley
WSLC Poet Laureate

For more information about The Utah State Women's Legislative Council, go to our website at www.wslcofutah.org.

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