

# Utah 2005

Governor Jon M. Huntsman, Jr., *State of Utah*

## INTRODUCTION

Our administration recently passed its 100-day mark. This is an ideal time to stand back and focus on what our campaign promises were and then, realizing we already have one legislative session behind us, evaluate how we are doing.

My goal has been to focus on four common-sense fundamentals: economic revitalization, education, quality of life and governance. Each of these priorities has purpose in helping shape our tomorrow; each is a reminder of our common destiny.

To accomplish this, we have tried to pay less attention to party affiliation or which branch of government we come from and instead focus on using our differences to strength our communities, our cities, and our state.

## ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION

The economy is central. We must be realistic about our competitive position as a state. No longer is the marketplace just along Main Street as it was for my grandfather in Fillmore.

Today the marketplace is regional, national and global—with a level of speed and complexity not seen before in human history. We either rise to meet the competitive challenges of today or we fall behind.

In today's world there is no such thing as managing the status quo. For Utah, this should be good news as our competitive advantages are many: human resources, research universities, entrepreneurial drive, and our geographic location as the "Crossroads of the West."

Now is the time to go to work on our competitive environment. With capital flows that are instantaneous, our competition isn't just Colorado, California, and Nevada, but also Canada, China, and India.

When it comes to economic development, treading water is not acceptable. We must have job growth that keeps pace with population growth. And for a state now growing at twice the national average, this will not be easy. We must have good paying jobs that allow people to support a family and cover a mortgage – not those well below the national average. The greatest state in America deserves better.

We need to be able to pay our bills going forward so that our children and grandchildren can enjoy the same quality of

life experience that we enjoy. We want an environment of opportunity for all who wish to call Utah "home."

I am pleased the Legislature passed House Bill 318. This bill restructured our Economic Development Department, making it leaner and more efficient. This was an important first step in enhancing our statewide economic competitiveness.

## EDUCATION

Focusing on economic development is vitally important because it will provide us with the resources necessary to pay for a world-class education for our children. There is no expenditure more critical to our future success.

I am reminded of a letter I recently received from my son's principal at Clayton Intermediate School, Rosemary Barron. She wrote:

"I urge you always to focus on public education. It is the vehicle to prepare our students toward active participation in our democracy. Nothing could be more important."

Increasing funding for public education is one of my top priorities. It is also paramount to develop a means to pay our educators more. I was pleased that the Legislature recently increased the funding we spend per pupil, the WPU (weighted pupil unit), by 4.5%. In addition, new funds were also provided to help attract more talented people to teach science, math, and special education classes to our children. I am also proud of the significant increase in funding that higher education received.

As some have said before, "Children are the messengers we send to a time we'll never see."

What we are finding—not surprisingly—is that no two children learn alike. All children learn differently. My own six kids—all of whom are in public schools—defy any easy categorization.

Our on-going challenge will be to find the genius hidden within each of our individual students. We will then need to ensure that our students not only have the tools, but the confidence needed to make meaningful contributions throughout their lives. Also, when evaluating our educational system, let's look to additional indicators of success. Instead of just the student-to-teacher ratio, let's look to things like an adult-to-student ratio. Let's tap into our vast volunteer potential

and can-do spirit by asking parents and grandparents to come back to the classroom for purposes of mentoring, tutoring, and career guidance. I am also encouraging business leaders to become more actively involved with education through implementing programs that unite them with parents, teachers, and students. It is time that every child had a learning environment that catered to their needs so they can have the education they deserve.

### QUALITY OF LIFE

While we are fortunate that this year's economic picture is bright, many unmet needs must be addressed. First, while the dedicated people who serve the State of Utah recently received their first pay raise in a few years—a 2.5% cost of living increase and a 2% increase in benefit coverage—we still need to focus on providing them the wages and benefits they need and deserve. Also, I was pleased that several million dollars were made available to help provide medical and dental benefits for those under the Medicaid program who recently lost this important need. Meeting the needs of the underinsured and uninsured will continue to be one of our state's greatest financial challenges.

Transportation issues must also be addressed now if we are to avoid total gridlock later. Promises made must be promises kept. For example, when it comes to the Legacy Highway, let's build it. And when it comes to taking the steps necessary to build commuter rail, let's take them. I have tasked Lieutenant Governor Herbert to work with legislators and residents from throughout Utah to do what we must to improve our roads, enhance our water systems, and make certain that Utah's infrastructure is in solid, working condition.

Recently I visited Lindon, Utah, to sign House Bill 1008. This legislation provides a roadmap of how transportation projects should proceed and outlines how they should be funded. It provides \$154 million in on-going funding of state transportation needs, including \$30 million in one-time funds for an addition HOV (high occupancy vehicle) lane for I-15 in Utah County. The cost to maintain and enhance Utah's transportation system is huge. Some estimate the total bill is \$7 billion dollars. However, the cost of not taking the necessary steps is greater. Utah is the fifth fastest growing state in the nation. Like education and health care, our needs will only increase in the future.

One item that continually concerns us all is something that could negatively impact our state for generations to come. It is the storage of radioactive waste. I will continue to work with our federal delegation to prevent nuclear waste generated in other states from being transported across our state and stored here indefinitely.

I am very pleased that during the first 100 days, concerns about the possible storage of B & C nuclear waste in our state have been resolved. The company that once sought to store B & C nuclear waste withdrew its request to do so. The leg-

islature passed and I signed a bill prohibiting this waste from being stored in our state in the future.

We have initiated measures that will help to protect our unparalleled quality of life. We live in Utah because of what it represents: home, family, and hope.

No matter where you travel or how you travel—north, south, east or west—you meet some of the finest people doing the most marvelous things for the betterment of their loved ones, their community, and their state.

I encounter good people in city parks, local cafes, churches, on ranches, and in high-rises—virtually everywhere I go. Each time my heart is touched and I am reminded that it is my sacred duty and responsibility to make sure we have a viable, core infrastructure—and plan to pay for it—to meet our growing needs well into the future.

### GOVERNANCE

Finally, we will focus on excellence in governance. I have sought to minimize politics and maximize service. I have appointed individuals from both sides of the political aisle to my administration. My goal continues to be to reach out to those who want to make a positive difference for our state.

To those who have grown tired and cynical, to those of the emerging generation who think political activism is extinct, I offer the pure spirit of public service, not as a protector of the status quo, but as an agent of change. I will continue to push for legislation that ensures the ethics of those who serve in the executive branch of government—the area that I am responsible to oversee.

As governor, I believe in term limits. No governor should serve more than two terms. During the 2006 Legislative Session I will work again to see a bill passed that will place on the ballot the chance for all Utahns to decide this issue. My administration will also focus on campaign-finance reform to keep fairness and transparency in government. I strongly believe these measures will make us more accountable for our actions and give us the ability to serve you, who in turn will have greater confidence in your public servants.

### CONCLUSION

As a newcomer to elected politics just completing my first 100 days of service, I recognize that the plan we are working is not easy. But it does outline the way for a better Utah. It won't work without cooperation between all branches of government. It won't be achieved tomorrow or within the next month. But it will be accomplished as we put partisanship aside and rally together toward a common destiny of jobs, education and quality of life.

My desire as the 16th governor of the greatest state in America is to serve each of you to my fullest potential, to listen to your concerns, and work with you to find solutions.

We are entering a period of unprecedented cooperation and community building. I salute the Hinckley Institute of Politics at the University of Utah for the vital role it plays in educating our youth, providing outstanding opportunities for public service, and informing our entire community about the vital issues of the day.

People truly reaching across boundaries—be they religious or race, political or geographic. A state that is sincerely civil and respectful of each individual's pathway toward life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness will be our goal. I can promise you that as we work together, we will become a better people and a better state.