

Opening Day Remarks

Speaker Mike Schultz

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The moment I stepped into the building, I could feel the energy buzzing within the walls of the Davis Catalyst Center. Inside, I watched as students immersed themselves in real-world experiences — some crafting marketing campaigns, others fine-tuning coding projects, or practicing medical procedures. This wasn't a traditional school environment—it was a launchpad for futures being built in real-time.

I met two high school seniors in the computer science program. They were so excited and confident as they showed me their projects—developing complex codes, running simulations, debugging programs, and creating digital designs — all things far beyond my understanding. They spend several hours each day at the Catalyst Center, working on real-world challenges that go far beyond the confines of a typical classroom. More impressive, these students aren't just preparing for graduation; they're stepping directly into the workforce with job offers in hand. Both have secured \$80,000-a-year positions with local companies.

Seeing their excitement, I saw my younger self in them. I, too, thrived when I could work with my hands, applying knowledge in practical ways. It was a powerful reminder that education is not one-size-fits-all.

These are real students with real opportunities.

Career and technical education like this opens doors many students never knew existed. By exploring trades and skills alongside traditional academics, they gain the confidence and credentials to take charge of their futures. This session, we have a chance to expand opportunities giving students the tools they need to succeed in a world that values practical skills and innovative thinking.

Let's invest in our kids and put them in the driver's seat for success after graduation.

From the buzz of the Catalyst Center to the quiet beauty of Utah's landscapes, I've been reminded of what makes our state so special. As Utahns, the outdoors isn't just something we enjoy—it's who we are. Whether it's camping under starlit skies, casting lines into crystal-clear rivers, carving through fresh powder, or hiking rugged trails, these landscapes define why so many of us love calling Utah home.

For me, some of my most cherished childhood memories come from these experiences. I can still picture myself as a kid, wandering the shores of the Great Salt Lake, learning to ride a dirtbike alongside my grandpa at Panguitch Lake, and the many camping trips to Antelope Flats, nestled along the shores of Flaming Gorge Reservoir.

Recently, I spoke with a county commissioner from Daggett County, Utah's smallest county, home to fewer than 1,000 people. His story hit closer to home than I expected. He described the current state of Antelope Flats—those very same shores and campgrounds where I spent countless summer weekends are now in decline.

Back then, Antelope Flats thrived. The campgrounds brimmed with life, tents, and RVs dotting the landscape from Memorial Day to Labor Day. But today? The campground operates at only 30% capacity. Not because people have stopped coming but because the federal government, which owns and is supposed to manage the land, has let it fall into disrepair. Trails are overgrown, facilities are outdated, and much-needed maintenance is left undone.

This neglect doesn't just hurt Antelope Flats. It hurts people all across Utah who want to create their own memories in the great outdoors but can't find a place to stay. It is time to change that. We want to take over the management of Antelope Flats, restore it to what it once was, and reinvest in its future. And we don't need the federal government working against us.

This is a real issue that impacts real Utahns.

But this isn't just about one campground—it's about who gets to decide Utah's future. No one knows or loves this land more than we do. It's time for Utah to manage Utah. In fact, we'd like to petition the federal government to allow Utah to stand as a national experiment, allowing us to keep a portion of our federal tax dollars, run the programs, and discontinue federal oversight. To our federal delegation, I have 3 words: Sign. Us. Up. We do it better than anyone. Whether it's education, transportation, Medicaid, public lands – we manage more effectively, more efficiently, and more affordably.

Just as we work to preserve the land, we must also invest in the people who will shape Utah's future. Across Utah, students fill college classrooms, preparing for careers that will shape their lives and livelihoods. But, for many, that dream is delayed. A traditional four-year degree increasingly stretches into five years or more, and the cost of that extended education can weigh heavily on students and their families. At the same time, our workforce needs more engineers, nurses, teachers, mental health professionals, and more.

We have the tools to change this. By partnering with our universities, we can streamline operations and refocus resources where they matter most. Trimming administrative costs, consolidating underperforming programs, and reinvesting the savings will allow us to expand

high-demand, high-impact programs. Every dollar saved can go back into the hands of students, ensuring their investment in education yields a brighter future for both students and our state.

Higher education is one of Utah's most powerful economic engines, driving over \$11 billion annually into our economy. But the road ahead isn't without challenges. According to national data and the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute at the University of Utah, nationwide, the college-age population is set to decline starting this year. Utah is projected to feel the effects beginning in 2032. If we fail to adapt, we will fall behind. If we wait, college will continue to become more and more unaffordable. But if we act now, we can bend the cost curve and position our higher education system to not just weather these changes but thrive in a new, leaner, and more competitive environment.

This is a real issue that impacts real Utahns.

We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reimagine higher education. This is our chance to lead, to innovate, and to build a future where Utah remains a place of opportunity for generations to come.

As we prepare students for the workforce, we must also ensure our kids can build lives here in Utah. Recently, I met a young couple who are about to welcome their first baby. They're constituents of Rep. Gricius, and their story is one of hard work, determination, and a glimmer of hope in what often feels like an impossible housing market. They'd been saving for years, watching prices climb higher and higher, and felt like homeownership was a distant dream—until last year. Thanks to Utah's new first-time homebuyer loan program, that dream became a reality. Today, they're proud owners of a single-family home, a place where they'll raise their children and build their future.

Homeownership is one of the top concerns for Utahns. It's the topic of conversations around kitchen tables, the subject of endless budgeting, and a barrier for too many young families striving for stability. Long seen as the cornerstone of the American dream, owning a home feels increasingly out of reach. The Legislature has taken significant steps to turn the tide, like introducing programs that provide a foothold for first-time buyers. But our work is far from over.

We must continue to collaborate with local governments to address planning and zoning challenges, empower the private sector to innovate and find creative ways to make housing more affordable and accessible. If we don't get housing right, Utah's number one export will not be its products. It will be our kids and grandkids. The American dream will be exported from Utah.

This issue hits home—literally and figuratively—for so many of us. That young couple is our kids, our grandkids, our neighbors, or ourselves. The struggle to afford a home is a reality for too many Utahns. The cost of living shouldn't stand in the way of families building their lives here.

Together, we can open the door to homeownership, creating opportunities for Utah's next generation to put down their roots.

We can—and must—make life more affordable.

Finally, let's not forget the incredible potential in our own backyard. Critical minerals are essential to modern life. They power everything from smartphones to electric vehicles, and from advanced defense systems to energy technologies. There are 34 critical minerals in the world, and Utah is home to 28 of them—more than any other state.

In the Southeast corner of our state, in the heart of Rep. Monson's district, Utahns at White Mesa Mill have developed groundbreaking methods to extract and refine rare earth minerals – a process that few, if any, in the world have managed to accomplish. One of their most remarkable breakthroughs is the extraction of radium used in cancer radiation treatments which is already saving lives in Germany. While not yet FDA-approved, the potential impact is staggering. With further development, it will revolutionize cancer treatment worldwide.

And it's all happening right here, in Utah's backyard. What's happening at White Mesa Mill isn't just about innovation. It's about independence. Their ingenuity has turned local resources into solutions that help reduce America's reliance on foreign powers like China, who currently dominates the global supply of these critical materials – which should cause us all great concern. China recently announced a ban on exporting critical minerals to the U.S., highlighting national security risks while disrupting progress and production. We cannot continue to depend on our adversaries to supply our way of life.

By unlocking the power of these minerals, Utah can help the U.S. reduce dependence on other nations and secure a brighter, more self-reliant future. These are real Utahns, solving real problems, leading us toward a future of innovation, and most importantly, independence.

As I reflect on these stories and experiences, I'm reminded that the issues we face are not abstract—they're deeply personal.

These are real people, real challenges, and real opportunities.

Parents juggling work and kids. Small business owners keeping their dreams alive. A young family trying to make ends meet. Policemen, cashiers, healthcare workers—everyday Utahns who get up every morning to build a better future for themselves. And we've got their backs.

We have challenges before us— energy, public safety, education, transportation, housing, the list goes on and on. These are not Republican or Democratic issues. These are not rural or urban issues. They are Utah issues. And the people of this state expect us to come together, roll up our

sleeves, and get to work. And that's not to say that Utahns expect us to agree on everything—that's not realistic, and it's not how democracy works. Utahns expect us to fight for them.

Fighting for Utahns means prioritizing policies that make life more affordable, ensure better opportunities for our children, and protect the unique natural beauty of our state for future generations. It means keeping communities safe, ensuring a strong economy, bettering our education system, and preserving the freedoms that allow every individual to thrive.

Today, I reemphasize the promise I made when first elected as Speaker: the people of Utah will come first. Their stories, struggles, worries, dreams, and potential will be the foundation of everything we do here.

We're here to serve. We're here for Utah.

Welcome to the 66th Legislature.

We've got 45 days.

Representatives, let's get to work.

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