

## **Opening Day Remarks**

**Speaker Wilson**

**January 17, 2023**

Everyone has moments in life when a decision has a profound impact.

I can no longer deny that I have reached a “certain age,” or as Arthur Brooks would say, I am on the “second curve of life.”

This smacks you right in the face – suddenly your kids are launching; family roles are changing; career options are shifting... Some of you know what I’m talking about.

For just a moment, I’d like each of you to take just a minute to think about a pivotal time in your life - when a decision you made (or that someone else made) had a lasting impact.

It’s out of my comfort zone, but I would like to share one of those moments that profoundly impacted my life and the lives of my family over 40 years ago. As a ten year old in the spring of 1979, when I was sporting my mullet and had buck teeth that would make a rabbit jealous, my family found itself in a whirlwind of change.

That year, my mom - who had been a full-time homemaker for over a decade - suddenly found herself a single mom-of-five, in a new home, without a job to help pay the bills. As the oldest in our family, I know she had many sleepless nights full of uncertainty and fear.

But the big changes for our family were just beginning.

A short time later, mom came into my room and let me know there was more change on the horizon. She had learned her old high school boyfriend had also found himself as a single parent raising his five kids. Mom had re-connected with Roger and found they were not only both dealing with the challenges of single parenting, but they also still had a lot in common.

Well, fast forward to Pioneer Day that summer. Mom and Roger tied the knot and we made room in our home for a new father figure and five new siblings we had met just weeks earlier. It was like the Brady Bunch on steroids.

A few weeks after my new siblings settled in, my step-dad, Roger, went off to work... in Brazil.

Roger worked six months a year off the coast of Rio de Janeiro for an oil company. That August, I watched mom get to work registering the ten of us for school, shopping at JCPenney for back-to-school clothes, and doing her best to blend two families into one.

Obviously there's a lot more to how we all grew up together, traveled together, destroyed the house and cars together, and shared two bathrooms between ten kids.

That was the beginning of many exciting and memorable times we've had as a family. Like any family we've shared good times and bad. Weddings, divorces, growing families and loved ones passing away.

You can see that a few important choices decades ago have had lasting and profound impacts on dozens upon dozens of lives. In turn, those decisions impacted me and, to one extent or another, everyone I interact with.

Big and small... good, bad, and necessary... decisions are made that create a ripple effect. And sometimes, the really big ones have an outsized impact.

Coming into this session, it has become crystal clear to me that as a state, and by extension, as elected representatives, we stand at one of those rare moments where our choices will ripple for generations.

We have arrived at this point through a once-in-a-century confluence of events:

- Being the fastest growing state in America
- A worldwide pandemic
- An historic drought and

- An unprecedented budget surplus

I cannot say it more clearly - and I don't think it is hyperbole... The decisions we will make this session will define Utah's next decade and beyond!

There are three policy areas, in particular, that will require our best thinking, our honest debate, and our determination to seize the opportunity and meet the challenge before us:

- First: Stewardship, particularly of our water, public lands and energy
- Second: Affordability as it relates to housing, taxes, and preventing government overreach
- And third: Investment, especially in transportation and education.

As we move Utah down the right path in these three areas, our state and all Utahns will benefit for many, many years to come.

I'd like to share some of my thoughts about the big decisions we face.

As Utahns, we all share in the sacred stewardship of our great state. We use the word stewardship because it implies taking care of something throughout the time it is entrusted to our care and leaving it better for those who come after us.

Current and future generations need our best thinking and our cooperation as we address issues related to water, energy, and Utah's incredible lands.

Utah has the distinction of being both one of the fastest-growing and driest states in the country. That leaves little room for error in how we manage our growth and our water.

If we fail to lead courageously our state will not continue its growth, future generations will have to find somewhere else to live and the cherished lifestyle we all enjoy will be at risk.

This has been a wet winter so far - and that is great. But one winter alone won't wash away two dry decades. The ongoing drought, our management of state water, increased resources for Southern Utah, and preservation of the Great Salt Lake are top priorities for this House.

Let's build upon last year's considerable policy success to encourage conservation and provide resources to help Utahns do their part to safeguard Utah's water.

Stewardship also includes care for Utah's public lands, which provide beauty, abundant outdoor recreation, and a rich supply of natural resources. We must ensure our lands are managed in a way that provides benefits for Utahns today and for generations to come.

Our stewardship efforts extend beyond water conservation and public lands. As good stewards, we must mitigate the damage caused by foolish federal policies.

Utahns rightfully shake their heads, confused by the Biden Administration's energy policy that forces production cuts of proven energy sources for Utahns while rushing to rely on renewable energy with complete disregard for reality.

The fact is, while showing real promise, wind, solar and the collection of renewable options are simply unable to produce enough energy to power Utah homes and businesses.

Case in point: the latest rule on Ozone Transfer from the federal government will force early closures of Utah power plants - putting reliable, affordable, and dispatchable power at significant risk in the next few years. Because the Administration hasn't been able to pass their agenda legislatively, their assault on our energy continues through rule making.

Utah's measured, all-of-the-above energy policy has powered decades of prosperity by providing the most reliable energy at the most affordable prices in the country.

We don't scoff at new energy technologies, but unlike other states, we know what it takes to keep the lights on today while we develop new technologies and reliable energy for the future. This Legislature will fight for a responsible energy policy that embraces efficiency and is based in reality.

Let's stand in the way of the federal government's egregious power grab and, at the same time, make moonshot investments in energy research and workforce development to prepare for Utah's energy future.

Our second focus is Affordability. An affordable Utah is vital to the long-term prosperity of our people.

By any measure, Utah's economy is strong - among the best in the nation. But living here is becoming too expensive for far too many, thanks in large part to federal money-printing policies that are driving record inflation.

The average cost of a home in Sevier County (as Representative Albrecht can attest) has risen by over 49 percent in just the last year.

It is impossible to ignore the sharp increase in Utah housing prices the past several years. For many young adults and those starting families, the idea of a starter home has become something they've heard about but have never really seen - a lot like a fax machine or a landline.

Joining us on the House floor today is the Meyer family: Ty, Allie, and their one-year-old son, Knox, and another brother on the way.

The Meyers live in Representative Matt Gwynn's district. Ty and Allie have felt firsthand the devastating impacts of rising costs, and out-of-reach home ownership.

Ty works full time and is rising through the ranks of his company, while Allie works part time because childcare costs more than she would earn working full time.

Rent increases forced Ty and Allie to move out of their house. For over a year, they have been looking without success for a new home of their own that fits a middle class budget.

The Meyers want to live in Utah. They appreciate our values and they want their boys to grow up near their family. But when you add high gas prices and the inflated cost of groceries to Utah's expensive housing and childcare... you can see how a family doing everything you could ask of them - view the American Dream as something always just out of reach.

Ty and Allie, you are not an isolated case. Across our state, thousands face the same challenges.

And we have your back.

It's a problem for buyers, it's a problem for sellers, and it's a problem for renters. It's a problem along the Wasatch Front, in southern Utah and in rural Utah.

The problem is high interest rates.

The problem is over-regulation.

The problem is simply a housing shortage.

Some of these problems we have no control over, but when it comes to over-regulation, there is something that can be done. Local governments are at the forefront of critical decisions that impact our housing supply... and some are doing it very well.

In Ogden, Mayor Mike Caldwell is taking an innovative approach to affordable housing. Already, nearly 65 percent of all affordable housing in Weber County is in Ogden. Ogden is now working to convert older hotels and motels to multi-family housing and has plans to use school district land to build more affordable housing.

Mayor Caldwell is here with us on the House floor today. Mayor, thank you for your work on this issue.

At the northern end of Davis County, Clearfield sits along the southwest side of Hill Air Force Base. Utah's robust aerospace and defense industry makes up 12 percent of our economy and Clearfield faces all the housing challenges that come with it.

Over the last three years, Clearfield has built over 1,700 attainably priced homes, the most in Davis County.

Clearfield Mayor Mark Shepherd is also with us today. Mayor Shepherd, we applaud the work you have done and we thank you for serving as a strong example and an effective case study as we address this issue.

Finally, Mayor Dawn Ramsey of South Jordan is here. Her city alone has built over 2,300 single-family and 2,800 multi-family homes since 2019. Her collaborative approach to governing and working with the private sector is paying dividends for her residents as community amenities and transportation solutions are flooding into her city.

Mayor Ramsey, Mayor Shepherd, and Mayor Caldwell... this session we're going to take a long look at how you've approached your respective housing challenges to see how we can extend your success to other parts of the state. Thank you for your leadership.

On this important issue, these three outstanding leaders have taken a head-on and hands-on approach and we thank them - but our housing crisis is a statewide issue and we need all local governments to follow the lead of these and other cities that recognize the problem and provide solutions - rather than hurdles - to those supplying houses for the people of Utah.

Representatives, the best way to ensure Utahns can continue to call Utah home is to allow them to keep more of their hard-earned money in their pockets.

Over the past five years, we have cut taxes by \$325 million.

\$325 million dollars.

And we're just getting started.

To the people of Utah: You will see historic tax cuts this session.

Our third focus is Investment and I'll highlight two areas where it matters most: transportation and education.

Utah's economic strength and population growth comes as no surprise. Our top-ranked economy, natural wonders, and creative problem-solving not only attract new people to our state, but make the people who live here never want to leave.

That means our investment in the future is more important than ever before.

For example, the transition to electric vehicles demands adaptation in our infrastructure and transportation funding. And our growth means that we must invest in roads, transit, and active transportation so we can all spend more time at our destination and less time getting there.

Of course, the point of investing is to get a return... and there is no greater return on investment than educating our children. Education inspires upward mobility, fosters innovation, and opens the door to prosperity.

However, our schools are only as good as the teachers we entrust our children to each day. We have thousands of incredible educators but we cannot ignore the fact that 42 percent of Utah teachers leave the profession within their first five years, and rural districts feel the impact of teacher shortages even more. We can make a teaching career more desirable and allow good teachers to do what they do best – teach.



It's no surprise that compensation is a major reason so many teachers leave the profession. And we're going to change that. This year, let's give Utah teachers their largest pay raise in the history of our state - and let's make sure that increase goes directly to their paychecks.

It's not just our teachers who need our help. Unfortunately, many of our teens are struggling. As a House, let's work to provide additional mental health resources to Utah's rising generation by providing funds for teen centers across the state.

And while we wish school safety required nothing more than a responsible adult to keep kids from sticking their tongues to a frozen flagpole, sadly the world we live in requires significant effort and investment to keep our kids safe. We will implement policies and fund initiatives to improve school safety across our state.

Representatives, I strongly believe that when it comes to education, one size does not fit all.

We can educate every student and empower parents to make informed choices about how their children are educated. Let's provide all students and their parents – regardless of their zip code, wealth, or abilities – the opportunity to learn in a way that makes sense for them and make sure Utah Fits All.

And those are just some of the issues we will deal with this session. Experience tells us we must expect the unexpected.

In recent years, we have seen issues that – at the time – seemed improbable to require our attention, then be thrust into the spotlight.

In 2020, we passed a trigger law on the chance Roe v. Wade was overturned. The decision by the Supreme Court last year rightfully shifted authority from the courts, back to the states. While we wait on a decision from the Utah Supreme Court, we must work to make legislative intent crystal clear before this session concludes.

Likewise, we were proven wise to address the importance of election integrity through the recent legislative audit.

Upholding the election process is key to our democracy, and our state will continue to provide proper oversight and ensure election integrity. Utah has high standards for elections because we proactively look for ways to improve our process and build trust.

So, you can see we've got our work cut out for us.

Throughout our state's history - and even dating back to our time as a territory - Utahns have embraced the spirit of taking the long view. Hard work is our hallmark and we're not afraid of doing the hard thing today to make tomorrow a little better.

It's something I know we all take great pride in - and we should.

Preparing for a stormy day has served us well in the past and will in the future.

Laying a foundation and building upon it with consistent effort and unwavering dedication have also served us well.

We are now positioned to capitalize on unprecedented opportunity.

Recalling the words of Irish playwright, George Bernard Shaw:

“My life belongs to the community, and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live. Life is no ‘brief candle’ to me. It is a splendid torch which I have got hold of for a moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to the future generations.”

For the next 45 days let's burn as brightly as possible...

The decisions we make this session will define our next decade and beyond...

It will impact the lives of every Utahn.

Let's get to work.

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