

## **What to look for in the 2006 Legislative Session**

When comedians joke about politicians, the most common remark for their source of material is, "You can't make this stuff up." The same can be said about the Legislature in Utah as they begin the 2006 session. In other words, our lawmakers are, to some extent, predictable and at other times, they provide us with political entertainment.

Over the years, some of our lawmakers in Utah have frustrated many and have helped only a few. But they have amused us with some off-the-wall resolutions and time-wasting publicity stunts. The laws they do pass, however, can have an impact on the way we are governed in our state and in our local communities.

Once again, education will be at the top of priority bills, but tax reform and tax cuts may well receive top billing because of the surplus in the state budget.

But other bills will receive some attention as well. Among the issues to be addressed are: Crime and Justice, Minimum Wages, Ethics Reform, Human Services, Transportation and Highways, and Voting Rights. Obviously, there are more issues lawmakers will deal with, including some of the perennial bills like the Hate Crimes bill and Private School Vouchers.

This year, hopefully with any luck, our Republican controlled Legislature will pay attention to what Utahns are saying and listen to the public needs. According to a Valley Research poll conducted recently, most Utahns believe education should receive the bulk of the surplus money, 61%, while some Utahns, 17%, believe we should receive tax cuts. Additionally, voters would like to see some type of ethics reform bills passed.

However, over the years, the Republican controlled Legislature has turned a deaf ear and has ignored most of their fellow citizens. In fact, legislators such as Senator

John Valentine, do not use polls as a decision-making tool when voting on bills. The claim is that they listen to their constituents when in fact; they listen to those who take the time to contact a legislator. Some Utahns try to be involved, but more are needed. Unfortunately, special interest groups, such as the Eagle Forum, receive more attention as they falsely portray the views of mainstream Utahns. For our government to be more effective, Utahns should know that is not what the legislators do. Rather, it is how much the average Utahn becomes involved.

The issues discussed in this session are indeed important to every Utahn. Even so, there is another trait of the Republican controlled Legislature that deserves notice and should be taken seriously among voters. And that is the issue of open government and the growing penchant of Republican lawmakers that are fond of governing behind closed doors. The Republican legislators need to realize they are employed by the voters of Utah. Lawmakers should be looking up to their constituents, as opposed to looking down on the voters of Utah.

To access a Legislator is easy. Look can up a Legislator on the State Government Web site or look in the government section of the phone book.

Richard Watson

Chair, Davis County Democrats