

Governor Gary R. Herbert
Inaugural Address, January 4, 2017

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Utah's Exceptional Spirit

Thank you General Burton.

And thanks to all of you who have joined with us today as I and the other constitutional officers of Utah have renewed our pledge to “discharge the duties of [our offices] with fidelity.”

Thank you for the opportunity that you have given me to serve as your Governor for the next four years.

I would also like to recognize the support of my family.

I particularly appreciate the assistance of my good wife, Jeanette. She has always been by my side, supporting and encouraging me along the way. She has fulfilled her challenging role as First Lady with grace and charm. She is an example to the entire state of the values of integrity, hard work, compassion, love of learning, love of family, and love of God.

I am also honored to serve with Lieutenant Governor Spencer Cox. He brings to our work wisdom beyond his years and a boundless love for Utah.

And Abby, I thank you for sharing Spencer with my administration. I recognize that much of the burden of public service is borne by spouses and family members.

So thanks to you all.

I am thankful for the beautiful and uplifting music we have heard today. As a state, we are blessed with amazing talent.

It seems fitting that we gather on Statehood Day beneath these magnificent murals memorializing Utah's pioneering heritage, to “honor, praise and [venerate] the founders we revere.”

Those early pioneers faced “head on” the grueling weather, and the sickness and hunger that made up the hardships of the trail. Yet they persevered and made it into this valley. And they unselfishly built roads and bridges for those who would subsequently follow, improving the way for their success.

I love Utah. I always have. And after serving as governor and interacting with leaders from the other states I have come to appreciate more fully Utah’s exceptionalism.

Today I would like to talk about what I see as the unique spirit of Utah.

By almost any measure, Utah’s quality of life and economy are among the best in the nation. Of course we recognize that we have our challenges and we certainly have room for improvement. But overall and by comparison, Utah is doing exceptionally well.

The question is: Why are we doing so well?

I believe the main reason is because of the genuine goodness of the people of Utah.

You may not always see it in yourselves, but the uncommon blend of your humility, your hard work, and your willingness to pull together, despite differences, defines the Utah spirit.

I remember growing up in Orem when there were more orchards than subdivisions, I saw this spirit of humility, diligence and cooperation in my home as my parents worked hard to provide the necessities of life to our family of seven children.

My parents encouraged me to supplement my weekly ten cent allowance by collecting and cashing in pop bottles, by picking and selling raspberries from the family garden, and by delivering the Salt Lake Tribune.

As I tossed the newspaper onto front porches, I never dreamed that I would one day show up on its pages as governor. But I did daydream -- like so

many kids -- that perhaps someday the sports section would feature me as scrappy hometown boy who had made it to the World Series playing centerfield for the New York Yankees!

My mother exemplified frugality. When I thought it was time to replace my tattered and torn jeans, Mom would simply patch them up again. Neither of us ever imagined that torn jeans would someday become high fashion!

Dad exemplified hard work. He sometime worked multiple jobs, seeking ways to increase our household income as a Geneva steelworker, as a service station attendant, as a milkman, and finally as a realtor and a homebuilder.

My father drilled into me a multigenerational Herbert family slogan that we still use today that says: “work will win when wishy washy wishing won’t.”

That kind of personal responsibility and effort was the foundation of the Herbert home. But I also saw how much the support and encouragement from family, friends, and neighbors meant in our lives.

Humility, hard work and mutual support have always been at the heart of the Utah spirit. We often talk about them in relation to the Mormon pioneers. But those qualities have been essential to each of the subsequent waves of pioneers who now call Utah home.

We see it with the Greek, Italian, Japanese, Serbian and other immigrants who came to Utah around the turn of the twentieth century to work in the mines and smelters. They were also Utah pioneers. They toiled hard and they quickly learned how much they needed the support of their churches, their fraternal lodges, and their mutual aid societies to weather the challenges of early industrialization.

I see that same Utah spirit in Yar Kuany Awan, a modern Utah pioneer who today led us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Yar had a difficult childhood. Yar grew up hiding from militants and dodging bullets in Sudan’s brutal civil war. She saw family and friends killed as she fled from one refugee camp to another.

In 2009, Yar sought refuge in the United States. She worked hard to succeed in her new life. She learned English, and learned about the responsibilities and rights associated with U.S. citizenship. She found mutual support from other refugees, from fellow congregants at the All Saints Episcopal Church and from the people of Utah.

Yar loves America. Her pioneer journey has taken her from the refugee camps of war-torn Sudan to marriage, to motherhood, and to full-time employment at a Utah medical device company. She truly exemplifies that the pioneer spirit is still alive and well in Utah today. And the best news is that, just last month, Yar was sworn in as a new American citizen.

I see the Utah spirit as we set aside differences and work together for the common good.

I witnessed this firsthand in the Fall of 2013. The gateway communities for our national parks were facing millions of dollars of lost revenue if the parks stayed closed as part of the federal government shutdown.

We immediately reached out to the Interior Secretary. And I still remember vividly our first conversation. She agreed that it would be best for the parks to reopen but that nothing could be done.

My response was “rather than talk about what we can’t do, let’s talk about what we can do.” And within 72 hours from that call, with the support of local communities and legislative leadership the parks reopened and the tourists returned.

I see this spirit in our legislative process. Lawmakers -- with very different ideas for what policies might be best for the state -- come together, share ideas, listen to one another, meet with constituents, and then reach consensus agreement on critical issues that affect everyday lives.

And that same Utah spirit is best exemplified in your own daily lives.

I have witnessed innumerable times your willingness to serve each other and to resolve problems that government alone could never hope to solve. You have done it in response to fires, floods, and other natural disasters.

Once again this last spring, in the wake of punishing wind storms and tornadoes, Davis and Weber County residents and others around the state provided countless hours of service without any prodding or payment.

I was touched when I read how 85 year-old Dewain Jenkins, along with dozens of his neighbors, showed up with his chainsaw to help Cheryl Davis, a recently widowed neighbor, deal with the loss of seven mature trees. Dewain told an enquiring reporter: "I just heard they needed some help, so here I am."

Such is the Utah spirit!

I am proud of the love and respect Utahns demonstrate for our public safety officers and members of the military. I have watched as thousands of you have reverently lined the streets and overpasses, hand-over-heart, paying final respects to those who have given the ultimate sacrifice. Time and time again you spontaneously show your unadorned loyalty, love, honor and respect.

I have seen you invoke the aid of heaven when human efforts have reached their limit. During the bitterly hot, dry and windy summer of 2012, Utah had become a tinder box. We witnessed heroism from our firefighters across the state. But after all we could physically do, most of the state still remained under red flag warnings.

Working with my council of interfaith leaders, we sent out a request for an extra measure of providential help in our battle against the fires.

And you responded with prayers in your synagogues, your mosques, your cathedrals, your chapels, and your homes, asking that life and property be protected and that the elements be tempered.

Within days of your collective prayers the rains came. And not just any rain, but gentle, soaking rains without the winds that would have exacerbated the fires. The elements had, in fact, been tempered.

I became governor seven and one half years ago, following in the footsteps of great former Utah governors such as special guests today Jon Huntsman Jr. and Michael O. Leavitt.

At that time I said that working together in unprecedented partnerships would bring unlimited possibilities. I believe that is as true today as ever. But, sadly, far too much of today's national public life is awash in divisiveness, polarization, incivility and lack of respect.

I believe that we as a state and as a people, can continue to stay above such division and cynicism.

I hope you appreciate how visitors to Utah frequently comment on your friendliness, the smiles on your faces, the contentment in your eyes and your infectious optimism.

Let us never lose that spirit!

Let us continue to set aside our differences and roll up our sleeves to accomplish what can be done instead of bickering about what can't be done.

Let us do all that we can to foster Utah's unprecedented partnerships in order to continue to unleash Utah's unlimited possibilities.

As we enter this new year, let us move forward with the same Utah spirit of those who came before us. Like them, let us work together to build roads and bridges that will improve the trail for the generations that are to follow.

I thank you for how you exemplify the Utah spirit in your daily lives.

May God continue to bless you, the great state of Utah and the United States of America.