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GENERAL SESSION

January 21, 2015

Program Topic: National Congressional Race

Presented by: State Issues

Acting Director: Kari Malkovich

Speakers: Sen. Luz (Robles) Escamilla (D) Dist. 1, Salt Lake County

Sen. Deidre Henderson (R) Dist. 7, Utah County

Kari Malkovich – President, WSLC

Ric Cantrell – Chief of Staff, Utah Senate

Sen. Escamilla, having just learned of the passing of WSLC Immediate Past President Sylvia Rickard, reminisced about Ms. Rickard and their warm, years-long friendship. Turning to state matters, the senator said this is her seventh legislative session and she is eager to begin. Since the state has a monetary surplus this year, some of the budgeting decisions will be somewhat easier.

Sen. Escamilla said Democrats are also still working on their own budget to submit for the session. The public may be unaware that both political parties submit budgets prior to the legislature as a whole establishing a final budget.

Utah's transportation issues this year include public transportation, as well as freeways and roadways. Creative thinking is always needed as our state addresses its varied transportation concerns.

On Health & Human Services related matters, a top priority for Democrats in the

legislature is the Medicaid expansion issue. Sen. Escamilla would like to see a full expansion. However, the Governor's "Healthy Utah" plan seems to be a feasible next-best option. She would like to see all citizens contact their legislators and urge them to support it.

The average wage for health care workers for the disabled is \$7.50/hr. There is a growing need for these workers, as they are leaving this difficult work for easier entry-level jobs that offer better pay. It takes 6 – 12 months for a homeless adult to receive federal disability benefits. Fortunately, the General Assistance Fund can step in with \$300/month to help until federal benefits begin.

Systematic problems with adoptions have come to the forefront of this session. The senator has been working on a new bill that would upgrade the database so the process can work more efficiently, unhampered by needless information gaps.

Responding to questions, Sen. Escamilla said she is hearing more public discourse about limiting the number of bills legislators can run during a given session. There are policy reform bills and “tweaking” bills. Perhaps, she suggested, a proposed limit could designate a difference between the two types. With over 1,000 bills already in the pipeline for this session, it’s become a problem. Her husband was previously a legislator in Arizona, where there is a limit. He was astonished, she said, at the number of bills run in Utah each 45-day session.

Sen. Henderson responded to Sen. Escamilla’s point regarding the growing need for health care workers for people with disabilities. She and Sen. Escamilla have been working together on this troubling problem. So many provider facilities are desperate. “What would we do,” she asked, “if they were to have to close for want of workers?” Even though the minimum wage has gone up, many are not aware that disability health care workers’ wages have not.

Utah is a fiscally conservative state. This fact has served us well during a static economy. Agreeing that a budget surplus makes the legislature’s job somewhat easier, she acknowledged there are more worthy causes than can be funded each session. The decisions legislators have to make are often heartbreaking.

Sen. Henderson is currently working on an exciting bill that will create one data portal for accessing state government information. It links the government transparency website, open.utah.gov, to another site data.utah.gov that will not only provide extensive state information, but allow the user to create charts, graphs, and more for personal use.

Sen. Henderson is also working with law enforcement, the ACLU, various police organizations and citizen’s groups to set up

procedures for dealing with use-of-force issues. There are currently many different policies used throughout the state, depending on the county. The coalition group is now in the process of crafting one single “best practices” bill for the whole state.

Responding to questions, the senator said she is in favor of some parts of the governor’s “Healthy Utah” plan, but not all. She has serious concerns regarding the diminishing federal money Utah would be dependent on for sustaining it. Regarding the number of bills put forward each session, she agreed with Sen. Escamilla that Utah legislators have far less research staff than do those in any other state. Consequently, they may not always thoroughly read each bill. She ran ten bills last year and, looking back, feels that may have too many. It will be interesting to watch this issue continue to evolve.

Kari Malkovich gave a brief overview of WSLC history, as this year marks its 95th year of service to the state.

The road to Utah women’s right to vote took many turns through the years and followed an interesting timeline. When Utah was still a territory, its women enjoyed the right to vote. On Sept. 9, 1850, the U.S. government took away that right when Utah was admitted to the union as an organized incorporated territory.

State legislators introduced a bill, subsequently signed by the governor on February 12, 1870, reinstating Utah women’s right to vote. In 1882, Congress passed the Edmonds/Tucker Act, denying all women the right to vote.

On January 4, 1896, Utah became a state. Its new State Constitution contained a suffrage clause, stipulating ALL Utah citizens had the right to vote. Finally, the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, guaranteeing all

American women the right to vote, was ratified on August 18, 1920.

A particularly notable woman within Utah's political history is *Martha Hughes Cannon*. She practiced medicine in Salt Lake and taught nursing courses. She also took an active interest in local politics and women's suffrage, attending the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 as part of a delegation of Utah women.

In a much-publicized election, Martha was one of five Democrats running as "at large" candidates for state senator from Salt Lake County. Among the Republicans for the office was her husband, Angus. Martha Cannon was elected on November 3, 1896, becoming the first woman ever elected to that office in the United States.

Ms. Malkovich noted that in 95 years of listening and learning, WSLC is still not only relevant, but also largely unique. It continues to fill the vital role of enhancing the political literacy of the women of our state.

Ric Cantrell described his appointed position as Chief of Staff for the House Speaker. His two main functions are keeping the state senate organized, and helping to "tell the story" of the Utah Senate, which he does through public speaking and employing social media. To that end, he urged citizens to go to the website SenateCloud.com for more information.

Responding to questions, he said he foresees an accord regarding Governor Herbert's "Healthy Utah" plan will be reached this session. It will probably be something that closely resembles the plan as it stands now. He does not anticipate any particular push by legislators to limit the number of bills they submit. The obvious time limit imposed by the 45-day session should be sufficient. Mr. Cantrell believes a part time legislature is a good thing. Interestingly, states whose legislators are paid less, have less staff, and don't meet year round, are consistently heralded as being the best-managed states.

Reported by Pam Grange

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