



Leadership and Accountability in the Utah Legislature Series

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Part 1. We should expect more from our representatives

In the Utah Legislature, bills always get passed for a reason. Sometimes that reason is because there's too much groupthink. The antidote to groupthink is to discuss the impacts of legislation in an open and transparent way.

In recent years, many harmful bills have been passed, with impacts on our health, our land, our water, economic inequities, and many other aspects of our lives. Why? A big part of it is because our legislators have failed to grapple with the bigger, harder questions that should guide good governance: What are we working towards? What values are guiding decision-making? Who gains and who loses, not just financially, but in all the ways that matter?

This is the first in a series of articles about what I believe better representation and governance should look like in Utah. Over the coming weeks, I'll examine several concerning bills from the last two legislative sessions, all of which were supported by Rep. Jason Thompson, including legislation affecting the courts, elections, accountability for powerful people and corporations, the economy and environment, protection of workers, and the ugly new politics of data centers.

I believe Rep. Thompson worked hard in his two legislative sessions. And I'll give him credit where credit is due. But all the votes matter. And the question is what outcomes his votes produce, who benefits, and who is harmed.

My intent is not to reduce Rep. Thompson to a voting record. Nor is it a claim that every complicated bill has an easy answer. Many bills address real concerns, and reasonable people can disagree about the best response. But a healthy democracy requires that we discuss the pros and cons out in the open. So I offer these critiques in the best tradition of democracy, and encourage Rep. Thompson to share his perspective.

A troubling pattern has emerged in the Utah Legislature. When faced with conflict or uncertainty, legislators have often responded by centralizing authority, limiting who can challenge government decisions, and moving forward without fully considering the harms done. I'm running against Jason Thompson, in part, because he supported these measures.

The Capitol is a place where repetition can make assumptions feel like facts. Legislators spend long days with the same colleagues, caucus leaders, lobbyists and advocates. Bills move quickly. Pressure builds to "support the team." Publicly expressing doubts can be



viewed as disloyal. People most affected by legislation may receive a few minutes at a microphone, while those with money, access and institutional power dominate the conversation for months. Some say “that’s just politics.” I’m running for the Utah Legislature because I think we need to be done with that kind of politics.

We should expect more from our representatives.

Better representation begins by seeking out the strongest dissenting voices, especially when they make us uncomfortable. It means asking who has not been heard and whose rights may be at risk. It means understanding the science and principles related to an issue. It means preserving checks on power even when those checks are inconvenient. And sometimes it means slowing down. Taking enough time to make better decisions.

That is the kind of representative I intend to be. I will not promise that I will get every decision right. But I do promise to ask broader questions, listen beyond the loudest voices and remain willing to reconsider my assumptions.

Utah faces decisions that will shape our communities, landscapes and institutions for generations. We should expect more than party loyalty and quick certainty from the people making them. We should expect careful reasoning, openness to dissent, attention to consequences and the courage to exercise independent judgment.

That is not too much to ask. It is the job.