



Leadership and Accountability in the Utah Legislature Series

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Part 6 of 6. The Data Center Rush Reveals a Bigger Problem With Utah's Leadership

Things are changing quickly in the world today. Most people I talk with feel that we are losing our ability to decide where we're headed. Utah's rush to build massive data centers is perhaps the clearest example of that.

Stratos in Box Elder County is just one of many data centers proposed. Major projects are emerging in Tooele, Iron, and Juab counties. Developments of this scale could require extraordinary amounts of energy, irreparably alter landscapes, and degrade water, air, wildlife, and Great Salt Lake for decades.

People are right to be concerned. But increasingly, I see data centers as a symptom of something bigger.

We are making enormous, interconnected decisions without having an honest, coherent conversation about where they are taking us, or whether they are actually improving people's lives.

Government is part of the problem. We discuss water in one committee, energy in another and economic development somewhere else. We debate individual bills without stepping back to see the system we are creating.

But the fragmentation goes deeper. Our news comes through outlets with different emphases, biases and blind spots. Social media can also sort us into information bubbles where only some perspectives are amplified, contrary views are filtered out. We can argue intensely about pieces of the problem without ever having the larger conversation.

How much electricity will all these projects require? Where will it come from? What will that mean for household utility bills, air pollution, climate? How much water will they consume? Who benefits? Who bears the risks? And most importantly: **Will this actually make life better for Utahns?**

Rep. Jason Thompson did not create this situation. But his record on data centers illustrates the problem.

In 2025, Thompson joined a unanimous House in supporting SB 132, which created pathways for very large electricity customers (100+ megawatts). That bill opened the door



for enormous data center projects. The fact that it was supported unanimously doesn't indicate that it was a good bill. It shows that groupthink can cross party lines.

In 2026, Thompson co-sponsored HB 76, requiring large data centers to report water use. That's useful. But reporting water consumption doesn't limit it or determine whether cumulative demands are sustainable. It's these blatantly inadequate measures that make us feel good, like we're doing *something*, while just barreling down the same old road.

He also voted for HB 507, which allowed nondisclosure agreements (NDAs), to be shielded from public disclosure. This allows data centers and other entities to negotiate with public officials for months before the public is even aware. Does that seem right to you? It doesn't sit well with me. Thompson is now a co-sponsor of a bill proposing to restrict MIDA's authority. This bill will move forward with or without him.

That's exactly the kind of policymaking that concerns me: adding a guardrail here while removing one there, without ever confronting the direction we are heading.

We shouldn't confuse doing something with changing course.

And we need better conversations about changing course. When elected officials' words and votes seem to point in different directions, they should explain why. When people raise serious concerns, they deserve answers, not silence.

That is something I would bring to the Legislature.

As a scientist, I have spent my career connecting things that initially appear separate, following consequences downstream and questioning assumptions when evidence doesn't support them. I am willing to ask questions that may make some people uncomfortable, if they are questions that need to be asked. And when I see unnecessary harm, I feel a responsibility to speak up rather than look away. That's who I am.

That isn't obstruction. **It is how honest conversations and better decisions begin.**

Data centers are forcing us to confront enormous questions. But they are also revealing a deeper problem: we need to get much better at seeing the whole picture, talking honestly with one another and deciding together where we actually want to go.

As your representative, I see my role as facilitating that broader conversation in our community. Thank you for taking the time to read and considering electing me to serve our community in this way.