



SPENCER J. COX

GOVERNOR OF UTAH

# 2025 STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS

UTAH STATE CAPITOL

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CHAMBER

SALT LAKE CITY UTAH

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Mr. Speaker, Mr. President, Lt. Gov. Henderson, Abby, Utah's public servants, and my fellow Utahns here tonight: welcome.

I want to start by congratulating and acknowledging the 19 newly elected members of our House of Representatives. Please hold your applause until all are mentioned.

1. Rep. Auxier
2. Rep. Chevrier
3. Rep. Dominguez
4. Rep. Fiefla
5. Rep. Fitisemanu
6. Rep. Koford
7. Rep. Mauga
8. Rep. Grant Miller
9. Rep. Tracy Miller
10. Rep. Monson
11. Rep. Nguyen
12. Rep. Okerlund
13. Rep. Peck
14. Rep. Roberts
15. Rep. Sawyer
16. Rep. Shallenberger
17. Rep. Shepherd
18. Rep. Shelley
19. Rep. Thompson

We also welcome three new Senators, each of whom already knows the inside of this chamber well:

1. Sen. Brammer
2. Sen. Musselman
3. Sen. Stratton

Last week I had dinner with our new legislators and their spouses. My favorite part of the night was asking them why they ran for this position. I wish every Utahn could have heard their answers. It was almost impossible to tell who was Republican and who was Democrat. They inspired me. Love is not too strong of a word to describe how I feel about the public servants here, and the work you have committed to do for the people of our state.

I shared with them one friendly piece of advice.

During this first week, you'll wonder "how on earth did I get here?" By your second week, though, you'll settle in and instead start to wonder, "how on earth did the rest of these people get here?"

Our time tonight is short, and so I'll ask, as in prior years, that you please hold any applause until the end of my remarks — hard as that might be.

We are gathered here in the matchless Utah State Capitol, overlooking the Salt Lake Valley. I want us all to take a moment and imagine what this valley looked like 180 short years ago.

Hard-packed soil. Light precipitation. Hot summers. Frigid winters. Limited fresh water. Sparse vegetation to sustain livestock. Dust storms turned day into night. Early visitors described it as "a barren wasteland." It was arid, untamed, and unforgiving.

On his journey westward, Brigham Young crossed paths with the famous American mountain man Jim Bridger, who told him, "Mr. Young, I would give a thousand dollars if I knew an ear of corn could be ripened in the Great Basin."

Then in July 1847, the pioneers saw this valley with their own eyes. It was so beautiful that one member of the party proclaimed, "Weak and weary as I am, I would rather go a thousand miles farther than remain in such a forsaken place as this."

And yet, almost 180 years later, our Utah desert has pulled off the most miraculous upset... the land has blossomed as promised, and our home has become the envy of the earth, and a world-wide destination.

We stand on the shoulders of giants. Our ancestors irrigated farms, excavated minerals, built homes and neighborhoods, powered cities, and connected this continent by rail. In the face of adversity, they built. They **built here**.

And my friends and fellow citizens, if there is one thing you take away from my remarks tonight, please let it be this simple refrain: **We must build**.

Scripture — and the 60's pop band the Byrds — tell us that "to every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under Heaven." **Now is a time for building**.

And so I am making this call to all Utahns, whether you live near the red rocks of Saint George or the snow-capped peaks of the Uintas; whether you look out over the copper-crowned mountains of the west or the mirrored waters of Bear Lake; to all Utahns in every corner of this state and anywhere in between — in every one of our 255 cities and towns; to Utahns of every race, background, and creed; to the young and the young at heart. **We must build**.

Today, we can renew our forebears' tradition of true grit. Generations of Utah entrepreneurs and leaders have fought through unfavorable conditions; and built in the face of cynicism. In time, those efforts turned Utah into what's now known as the best state in the country to start a business; the #1 state for social mobility; the state where young people can still out-earn the prior

generation, and the #1 state overall; in short, the place where the American dream still means something.

And yet, we are not satisfied. There are those who would see us turn into what so many parts of the country have become, where ambition and building have died.

You see, Utah's values used to be American values. For much of the 20th century, the United States led the world in infrastructure, housing, and technology. We built roads, bridges, and homes at an unprecedented pace. We harnessed our industrial might to win world wars and stop fascism. We stood as a bulwark against communism. Strong families, neighborhoods, and communities were the foundation of this era of growth.

But over the past couple of decades, a tragic gap has formed between American ideals and our actions. Negativity and inertia have replaced America's culture of building.

**We stopped building infrastructure**, as a tangle of overregulation, outdated permitting processes, and entrenched NIMBYism fed by special interests and bureaucracies block the projects we desperately need.

**We stopped building technology** — ceding far too much of our manufacturing, industry, critical minerals, and energy production to our adversaries.

**And, worst of all, we stopped building resilient people.** For decades, families have been under attack. The mental and physical health of our teens is threatened daily by large social media companies. Our national birth rate is in steep decline, and demographic concerns now present one of the gravest threats to our shared future, all while deaths of despair have skyrocketed.

But not here. At least not yet. Utah is an outlier. Utah has stayed... weird. In the best way.

Here we still believe that our greatest achievements lie not in our own success, but in that of our children and grandchildren and the communities we build. Our hope is that they can grow up in a land of freedom; where they are safe, where their God-given rights are fiercely protected, where their opportunities are as boundless as their imaginations, and where they can get an education, get married, and have families of their own that live near us... but not always with us.

Utah may be one of the last places in America that still believes these words of Teddy Roosevelt: "Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat."

From thousands of conversations that I have had with Utahns across the state, I know this: Utah is not done dreaming. We're not done doing big things. And we're not done building.

Now, I recognize that when I talk about building, some people get nervous. Some might even argue that we've blossomed a little too much. I often hear valid concerns about our growth. The warnings are stark. One example: A Deseret News headline warned, "Resources Of [The] State

Unable to Support More [Growth].” In that article, experts and civil engineers made it clear that Utah just doesn’t have enough water to sustain more growth and forcefully cautioned of a “rebuke by nature” and threat of significant loss.

Even my special Sanpete County is being overrun. One article noted that, because of intense resource scarcity, some farms have shut down, and families have moved away. Times, as the media and experts have warned, are indeed bleak.

But...I guess this is the part where I tell you that the Deseret News Headline wasn’t from today but was actually printed in 1942. When our population was 580,000 people. Oh, and that Sanpete County article came from 1867.

So, how is it possible that our state added an additional 3 MILLION people, 6 TIMES more than in 1942 while also improving the quality of life? And is it possible to do it again?

While the answer is simple, it’s not necessarily easy.

We must build.

History teaches us that in Utah, when we are united and act together, we have always found a way past pessimistic prognostications. For 180 years and counting, Utahns have been building our way out of problems, even when things looked impossible.

And as so often is the case, we can find answers and inspiration by looking back. Let me share three stories that illustrate what it has meant to build infrastructure, technology, and people here in Utah.

As a child, **John Rowe Moyle** learned the craft of stonemasonry from his father in England. His family immigrated to the U.S., and in 1856, they pulled handcarts west to Utah. John was asked to put his stone-cutting skills to work to help build Temple Square.

He had a long commute. From his farm in Alpine, John would leave his home at two o’clock in the morning every Monday, embarking on a six-hour walk to ensure he was at his post on time. Then, every Friday evening, after a full week of work, he would begin the long journey home, leaving at five o’clock and walking nearly until midnight to reunite with his family. He repeated this grueling routine, week after week, year after year.

Then one day, John was kicked by a cow and suffered a devastating compound fracture of his leg. Without access to medical care, they had no choice but to strap him to a door and amputate his leg near the knee.

Undeterred, John carved a wooden leg for himself. Using the wooden leg, he taught himself to walk again. Though extremely painful, he built up his strength, and was soon able to make the 22-mile journey to Temple Square every week, as he had before.

He saw the project completed in 1893.

Our state's motto is "Industry." John lived it — like many generations before us who poured their literal blood, sweat, and tears into building the infrastructure we rely on today.

**When it comes to building technology**, it's hard not to think of **Philo Farnsworth**. Born in 1906, Philo was a farm boy who collected issues of Science and Invention magazines.

At 11 years old, his parents took him to Salt Lake City. He marveled at the electric street lamps, the steady hum of automobile traffic, and the web of telephone and power lines that connected a modern world.

Philo dreamed of building technology that would change the world too.

At just 14 years old, he stunned his family and teachers by sketching out the basic design for the world's first electronic television system — an idea sparked while tilling fields on the family farm.

A year later, tragedy struck and his father passed away. Philo became a primary provider for his family. All of this took time away from his scientific pursuits, but with great perseverance, Philo ultimately turned his ingenious sketches into reality, changing the world forever by creating the world's first fully functional electronic television.

Philo built technology not only when it was easy, but when it was hard.

**We know how to build great people here too.** In 1940, Alben and Gunda Borgstrom said farewell to their two oldest sons, Boyd and Clyde, as they went off to serve our country in World War II.

As was customary for the time, Mrs. Borgstrom hung a service flag in her window in Thatcher, Utah — a flag with a white field and a red border. Two blue stars were sewn in the middle.

In 1942, she added another blue star for her son Leroy, who joined the military as a medic. The following year she added two more blue stars for her twin boys Rolon and Rulon. They were just 18. She anxiously awaited the return of her 5 boys.

In her own words, “The nightmare began on March 17, 1944. I answered the door and there was the Western Union man, with a telegram for me.” Clyde was the first to lose his life in the war effort. The service flag in the window of the Borgstrom home, once adorned with only blue stars, now carried one overlaid with gold — a sad symbol that everyone of that era understood.

Just a few short weeks later, another telegram turned a second blue star to gold. Leroy, the medic, had died while saving a fellow soldier in Italy. Then it was Rolon, whose bomber crashed in England. Another star changed to gold. Finally, Rulon, who died in France. A fourth gold star.

Four of Mrs. Borgstrom's five deployed sons had died at war within 6 months. She became the only four-gold star mother of World War II. Her grief was immeasurable.

And yet, in this valley of despair, Mrs. Borgstrom went on a national radio broadcast to help raise money for the war effort. She offered words of hope to a shaken nation: “I want to send a mother’s prayer to all of the boys tonight,” she said. “We here at home are proud of you boys and we hope that God will bless and protect you through this fearful war.” It was one of the most successful war bond drives ever. In her moment of greatest need, she was out serving others.

A funeral was held in Garland, and Mr. Borgstorm told the Army commander of the western U.S. that he would ask for no exceptions in the conscription of his youngest son who still lived with them. He was 19, the same age as the twins when they died. “When his country needs him, he will go.”

Some members of the Borgstrom family are with us here tonight, and I ask them to please stand. For them, of course, please do applaud.

These are the kind of people we build in Utah. Even when life forces us through more than we can seemingly bear, we build.

And so today, we are at a fork in the road: we can either press forward with our pioneer spirit, our grit, our industry and our faith, and build the next great chapter of Utah’s story — or we can be washed away in the negative, nationwide malaise of dysfunction.

Remember this. The blood of John Moyle, Philo Farnsworth and the Borgstroms is the same blood that courses through our veins. Their DNA is our DNA.

Today, serving side-by-side with legislators here, I'm proposing bold action — and building — in five key areas:

First, **housing attainability**. We are reforming the regulatory regime, supporting more single-family construction, and fast-tracking approval processes. Through the Utah First Homes program, we will build 35,000 starter homes in five years. The greatest generation did this after WWII. We can do it again. Thank you to Sen. Fillmore and Rep. Whyte for leading out on what will surely be the defining issue of the next several decades.

Second, **energy abundance**. We're laying groundwork for advanced nuclear reactors while protecting national security by building capacity to be a net energy exporter through Operation Gigawatt. Together we will unleash Utah’s immense energy resources and drive prices down, all while making our grid more secure and reliable. Thank you Pres. Adams, Sen. Sandall, Sen. Millner, Speaker Schultz, Rep. Albrecht, and Rep. Jack, among many others here tonight, for your work to unleash American energy.

Third, **infrastructure and permitting reform**. We recently celebrated the construction phase of a new transmission line — that the federal government took 15 years to approve. Fortunately, we finally have a federal administration willing to work with us to fix this national embarrassment. In the meantime, we will continue to lead the nation by streamlining Utah’s processes while

maintaining environmental stewardship. Thank you to Rep. Clancy for your partnership to rightsize the permitting process for critical infrastructure projects.

Fourth, **community safety and support**. We're implementing public safety reforms that balance accountability with compassion. Our innovative homeless initiatives are showing results. We're demonstrating that we can have both security and dignity, and we are not shy in declaring that is what all Utahns deserve. Thank you, Rep. Lisonbee, for leading efforts on the issue of public safety.

And finally, **family strength**. It's a bit embarrassing that we are one of only 8 states that still taxes social security benefits, and I am determined to see this tax eliminated, putting money back into the pockets of our beloved senior Utahns. It's time. Check that — it's way past time. I appreciate so many of you who share this commitment to eliminate the social security tax like Sen. Harper, Rep. Brooks, and Rep. Christofferson.

I am so proud that Utah has led a weary nation in protecting the youngest among us by empowering parents who want to shield their children from predatory social media practices. But there is more than must be done. We must rethink data privacy and portability. Thank you Rep. Fiefia, Rep. Moss, Rep. Teuscher and Sen. Cullimore for your continued efforts in this area.

And we must get phones out of schools. Thank you Sen. Fillmore for leading the way.

Let's always remember this truth: when families win, Utah wins.

I commit that my administration will do all in our power to unlock the power of building — here.

But we must never forget, as I stated in my inaugural address two weeks ago, that our government is not what makes Utah great. It's our people. Faith, Family, and Community. Moms and Dads, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, friends and neighbors. There never has been nor will there ever be another replacement.

So, mostly, I want to make sure that our government stays off your back and out of your way, so that we do not block the good that I know you are eager to do.

And in this process, if we all do our part, I know that we'll build on the legacy of Utah's best — people like the Borgstroms.

Just yesterday in this very room, the Utah House of Representatives, led by Rep. Tom Peterson, passed unanimously a resolution that will rename Highway 102, which runs through Tremonton and the old Borgstrom Family farm in Thatcher; it will soon be known as Borgstrom Brothers Highway.

In the eulogy at the Borgstrom brothers' funeral, their high school principal said, "So long as our land has in it such families as the Borgstrom family, and such boys as these boys who lie before us, America will not perish from the earth."



And so, like those who went before us, and despite any obstacles in our path, **we must build.**

**Built Here** means remembering that every bridge, building, and breakthrough started with someone who refused to accept impossibility.

**Built Here** means rejecting false choices... like building thousands of new homes and maintaining our quality of life.

**Built Here** means being unrelentingly impatient in our pursuit to make this a happier place to live, because we know that success is not inevitable, it is earned.

**Built Here** means axing every tax that we can, so that our people can put more of their hard-earned money to work in providing for their families and chasing their dreams.

**Built Here** means rejecting conflict entrepreneurs, who would weaponize our attention and energy, and destroy that which makes us special.

**Built Here** means supporting the free people of Utah in finding their own way to build. Whether it's a business, a farm, or a family.

**Built Here** means making Utah inclusive to every lawful newcomer, while fiercely guarding the proven values that make us proud and peculiar.

**Built Here** means still doing the big things — the hard things — in our lives and in this session.

**Built Here** means not forsaking our ideals when we fall short of them, but dusting ourselves off, improving what we can, and narrowing the eternal gap between the “is-ness” and “ought-ness” in ourselves and the world around us.

**Built Here** means giving our kids and grandkids an inspiring story to tell about our time.

So that 180 years from now our descendants can look back at us with the pride and gratitude and reverence that we feel in our hearts today.

Utah, **we must build.** May God Bless us, our nation and this great state as we build together.

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