

January 23, 2023

## Salt Lake County Mayor Jenny Wilson's State of the County Speech

Good evening and welcome Salt Lake County residents. I especially want to welcome my friends from West Jordan and thank the County Library team here at the Viridian Event Center for hosting us. I'd like to ask Mayor Dirk Burton and members of the West Jordan City Council to stand and be recognized tonight

Members of the Salt Lake County Council and our county elected officials, please stand. And any additional elected officials, mayors, councilmembers, legislators, would you also please stand? Thank you for being here tonight.

As we enter 2023, Salt Lake County remains one of the best counties in the nation to live, work, and raise a family. Salt Lake County has the most diversified economy in the state. We're home to many amazing small businesses that help drive our positive economic growth. We house several leading schools of higher education, where game-changing discoveries are common-place. Salt Lake County's unemployment rate of 2.4% remains one of the lowest in the nation. Salt Lake County is 1 of only 40 counties with a Triple-A bond rating from every major agency – the highest possible grade. Amazing, especially given there are over 3,000 counties in the nation.

I want to thank our finance team, Treasurer Wayne Cushing, Assessor Chris Stavros, Auditor Chris Harding, and the County Council for your efforts to maintain our Triple-A rating. Your work allows us to keep taxes down and provide additional quality services.

Our tourism industry bounced back stronger than just about anywhere. Revenues and hotel bookings are back to - or exceed - pre-pandemic levels.

Speaking of the convention industry, Salt Lake County continues to host internationally significant events that support our bottom line. And this year, we're bigger than ever.

The Outdoor Retailer Show just wrapped. Back in Salt Lake County for the first time in five years.

The Sundance Film Festival is in full swing at this moment. In person for the first time in 3 years. With many of the films screening here in the Salt Lake Valley.

Next month we're hosting the NBA All-Star Game in downtown Salt Lake City. Last year's game was in Cleveland, and the economic impact was huge. Almost \$250 million was generated in one weekend. And, here in Salt Lake, with thousands of attendees coming in early or staying late so they can experience the greatest snow on Earth, it looks like we're on track to crush Cleveland's total revenue. And, for everyone who remembers the last Salt Lake All-Star Game, I am excited to announce Jam Session is back. We held this in '93 and people loved it. I'd also like to highlight the free Ice Buckets Challenge currently being held at Trolley Square, the annual Historic Black College and University game, and the All-Star practice session. These provide more affordable ways for residents to experience All-Star Weekend.

I am looking forward to the sights and energy that will flood downtown Salt Lake like we haven't seen since the Winter Olympic Games, 21 years ago. Once again, Salt Lake County will be the showcase of the nation. I'm excited to welcome the world back for this special weekend.

Salt Lake County continues to invest in community-based economic development, senior centers, recreation, the arts, parks, and libraries. These investments are foundational to our quality of life here in our county.

In spite of the strong economy and news of the quick recovery, there are challenges that we need to address head on. Too many families and small businesses are still struggling to make ends meet. Too many children still wonder when their next meal will be. Too many residents are still unable to afford a home of their own. And too many of our neighbors still feel unwelcome. Side by

side with you, I will continue to work to assure that Salt Lake County becomes a better, more prosperous, and more inclusive community than ever before.

It wasn't that long ago that gathering like this, as a community, wasn't even possible. And while we continue to have health risks including RSV and flu, and COVID-19 remains a health threat; as of January 3, the 1,033 days of Salt Lake County's DECLARED Covid Emergency are over.

I am proud of the work that the Salt Lake County Health Department and the broader Salt Lake County government accomplished together. Sadly, despite the tireless work of many, we lost over 1,800 family members, friends, and neighbors due to the pandemic. It is important to acknowledge the pain and the sadness so many have experienced.

Nonetheless, I'm proud of what each of you did as business and community leaders to help support our county during this challenging time. Salt Lake County, we are resilient!

As we enter 2023, Salt Lake County will continue to provide amazing, life-enhancing services to our community. The county's financial status is strong – yes, due in part to federal investment – but also due to the steps we took early on to mitigate the crisis. We implemented strict budget cuts. We redeployed our workforce. And, by remaining in a declared emergency until the end of 2022, we secured additional \$50 million in Federal Emergency assistance.

It was the County's strong management team, creative budget staff, and brilliant legal minds who kept us in compliance with Federal requirements day in and day out. Beyond funding our emergency response, these funds have allowed us to provide deep support to the community. We also were able to boost county services and resume critical projects that had been postponed.

Through a coordinated budget review process with our County Council, we are investing in:

A \$20 million enhancement to the County's Housing Trust Fund. Grants will be provided to help build more "deeply affordable housing."

A \$5 million infusion into our Open Space Trust Fund. We will purchase additional pristine lands, benefiting current and future generations. We can always build another building, but every time we do, it's less open space for us to enjoy. Our valley is blessed with stunning landscapes and access to recreation. Let's protect these vital areas.

An extensive investment into new trails. This includes a multi-million dollar investment in opening up biking, hiking and equestrian trails in Butterfield and Yellowfork Canyons. Additionally, we're building urban connector trails like the one that will be joining Magna, Kearns, and Taylorsville.

We have appropriated \$19 million for water conservation projects. We're switching out synthetic turf for grass on a few of our playing fields with more to come. We're flipping park strips and installing water wise landscaping at county facilities. We're updating park irrigation systems and partnering with Jordan Valley Water to provide grants for cities and townships to do the same.

And millions more have been set aside to modernize senior centers and support workforce development programs.

I've been reflecting recently on the work of our County Health Department. The pandemic certainly confirmed its importance. The Health Department is working to improve outcomes for all key measures of our health. We know Salt Lake County excels in many areas. For example, we are healthier than the average county when it comes to cancer and diabetes, and our youth obesity rate is tied for the lowest in the nation.

That's the upside, but we do need to continue our focus on increasing childhood immunization rates, and decreasing the number of residents suffering from addiction, depression, and mental health challenges. And, if we can improve our air quality, we will see a decrease in the number of people with asthma.

I'm encouraged by the progress we've made. And our Health Department is building off of lessons. It has retooled its operations, building on the "take it to the community" model they implemented during the pandemic.

Remarkably, during COVID we managed to set up almost 2,500 community-based clinics for testing and vaccine distribution. In places like churches, grocery store parking lots, and neighborhood centers, the Salt Lake County Health Department was everywhere, serving our residents. Here today are Health Department Director Dr. Angela Dunn and members of the Health Department's community outreach teams. These amazing team members were out in the cold and the heat, in the rain and the snow, day in and day out, all to support our community's health and safety. Please stand. Let's give this team a round of applause.

2023 will bring about a renewed focus for Salt Lake County in a few critical areas, and we will embrace partnerships with local leaders and community partners.

As one of the fastest growing counties in the nation, let's plan for the future. This means investments in infrastructure, transportation, services for an aging population, and preserving our open spaces and canyons.

Salt Lake County's role in modernizing the criminal justice system is extensive. A broad group of stakeholders – both in and out of Salt Lake County – are deeply engaged in efforts to further break down barriers. I want to complement our Human Services and Criminal Justice teams, along with District Attorney Sim Gill and Sheriff Rosie Rivera. We collectively approach this work understanding it's better to feed the child than jail the adult.

In recent years, we added a public Jail Dashboard for transparency and to better connect our data with our decision-makers. And not long ago we opened our Jail Exit Program which provides resources so inmates leave the jail with a productive plan as they re-enter the community.

Salt Lake County joins many community and government partners in its commitment to address homelessness.

We have supported the operations of our homeless resource centers, expanded the inventory of deeply affordable housing, and worked to mitigate impacts to communities and neighborhoods. During early morning hours this week, we will conduct our county's annual homeless count. Please join me and hundreds of volunteers who will be out connecting with these members of our community.

2023 and beyond, Salt Lake County is doubling down on air quality initiatives. We are advancing solar energy at county facilities. We will continue to switch our fleet from gas-powered to low-emission vehicles. And we are updating the massive heating and cooling unit at the Salt Palace to a more cost effective – and freon free – system.

Additionally, we are working with UTA and other partners on an E-Bus air quality monitoring and mapping pilot program. The project is on track to be the largest of its kind in the world.

Looking back over the years, I take pride in the civil and friendly way Utahans have traditionally engaged with each other. Yet, right now, one of the most poisonous issues that we face is division, both in politics and in our neighborhoods.

Things are just more tense than they used to be. Just this weekend I noticed this sign at a bagel shop. WE THINK OUR STAFF ARE PRETTY AMAZING! WE WILL NOT TOLERATE THEM BEING BULLIED OR UNKIND WORDS! Really, are things so bad that businesses need to post signs to prevent their workers from being bullied?

I wake up each day and turn on the news. After an overnight storm, the morning coverage will be dominated by traffic updates, messy roads, and the wait to see about possible school closures. It's not uncommon to hear the newscasters say "pack your patience" on the roads today.

Salt Lake County, don't forget to pack your patience - with each other.

Put kindness for your neighbor first.

A week ago was Martin Luther King Jr. Day. I remember being struck by the very powerful message the University of Utah chose as this year's theme: "Choose Love Over Hate." In the words of Dr. King "love can sometimes feel insurmountable but each small stone – when piled together – can become a stronger, more permanent fixture."

Or, as Arthur Brooks said in Love Your Enemies, "love and warmheartedness might not change every heart and mind, but they are always worth trying."

My challenge to each of you is to remain diligent in the role you play. We are never going to all get along, we are never going to all agree on the same ideas but civil engagement and conversation with each other can go a long way.

First responders don't ask your political affiliation during a rescue. Your accountant doesn't need to know your religion to do your taxes - I use these examples to share why I want us all to play on the same team.

Stronger together. Common projects and goals will be the blueprint for any success we will share down the road. Salt Lake County is a shining example to the rest of the nation, and I will continue to do my very best to put plans in motion that unify, celebrate, and honor all that we are.

And it's for these reasons that tonight I am launching a community wide book club ... but there is a twist. It is 2023, so perhaps a 'multi-media' club is a better title. We'll read books, but also watch films and videos, and hear stories that can move and unite us all.

We are here at the Viridian, one of our county's most beautiful libraries. Last year, Salt Lake County's library system served 2.5 million visitors who checked out more than 12 million items. Whether you choose to read or listen, let's engage in something together.

So, a couple of times a year, a new book will be announced and, after everyone has had a chance to dive in, we will gather to discuss the book and share. We'll invite authors or the subjects of the story to participate. I expect we will tackle compelling and inspirational stories. Perhaps some written or produced by Salt Lake County residents.

I am excited to announce our first book today. It's about a sport. And while there are some unique reasons this year to read this book, I am also drawn to it because sports are a force that unites us. All walks of life standing together to cheer on a team.

The inaugural book for the Mayor's Book Club is  
Basketball: A Love Story

. And with the NBA All-Star Game just a few weeks away, it seemed like the perfect fit. It is written and compiled by award winning sports writers. Celebrating and educating readers on the history of the game.

Did you know Moses Malone was the first pro to come straight out of high school? He played right here when he was drafted by the Utah Stars of the ABA. Or that both Karl Malone and John Stockton as college players were cut from the 1984 Olympic team, making their appearance on the '92 Dream Team all the more special.

This book is a compilation of interviews and stories woven together as a tapestry of the sport over time.

The county libraries are also offering audio and video versions. The authors, along with ESPN, produced a documentary based on the interviews in the book. You can watch it on HULU.

In keeping with this first book, I want to recognize another very special guest here with us tonight. Utah Women's Basketball Head Coach Lynne Roberts. The Utes are currently ranked #9 in the nation! An accomplishment that can't be achieved without incredible teamwork!



Lynne is going to stick around for a quick conversation during the reception, so you'll all get a chance to hear her own basketball love story.

I am excited to share everyone here is going home with their own copy of the book. I want to invite you all to a discussion of the book at a special event during All-Star Weekend. Details can be found on the bookmark included in your copy.

As you can see, the state of our county remains strong. I believe as a community, and with teamwork, we will continue to thrive. I look to 2023 as a chance to rebuild and rediscover our strengths, and I challenge all of you to find a way to be a part of that success.

This is your County. Your engagement – through school, community, faith and civic participation will keep us strong.

I am inspired everyday by you, the work you do, your families, and your stories.

Individually we are all important and make our mark, but together we will always be stronger.

In that spirit of that unity, I invite you to tonight's reception. Let's come together and celebrate us, Salt Lake County. Let's mingle. Let's connect. Tell stories. Seek common ground. Salt Lake County can be our own 'love story,' I know it's mine.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve you!

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