

At county convention, Lt. Gov. Cox says Utah could lose Republican majority if conservatism isn't better explained to younger voters

Link: <https://www.stgeorgeutah.com/news/archive/2019/04/27/mgk-at-county-convention-lt-gov-cox-says-utah-could-lose-republican-majority-if-conservatism-isnt-better-explained-to-younger-voters/#.XMcali2ZPuQ>

Written by Mori Kessler
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ST. GEORGE — While highlighting Utah's status as one of the nation's best economies during a speech at the Washington County Republican Party's organizing convention Saturday morning, Lt. Gov. Spencer Cox also warned his fellow conservatives about a growing trend of young people in the state moving away from the Republican Party.



Participants arrive for the 2019 Washington County Republican Party's organizing convention held at Dixie Technical College, St. George, Utah, April 27, 2019 | Photo by Mori Kessler, St. George News

Held at Dixie Technical College, county Republicans gathered for the annual convention to decide on new party leadership and to hear from various party and elected officials. Opening the convention was the Lt. Governor, who started his remarks by singing Utah's economic praises.

"There are great things happening here. Things that were never thought possible," Cox said. "We've led the nation in private sector job growth over the last three years, and we're No. 1 — the best economy in the country. Something people, again, never thought was possible."

Cox joked that as much as he'd like to take some credit for the state's good fortune, he instead gave recognition to the state's business owners and entrepreneurs. Yet, he also noted the state government has done away with over 300 business-related regulations over the last three years "to allow the free market to work."

"And it is working," he said.

Cox then said he had to share "a little bit of bad news" and asked for the county Republicans' help to combat it.



Utah Lt. Gov.

Spencer Cox delivers a speech at the Washington County Republican Party's organizing convention held at Dixie Technical College, St. George, Utah, April 27, 2019 | Photo by Mori Kessler, St. George News

"We are seeing a trend, a very, very troubling trend, and it involves our party and young people," he said. "Unfortunately, young people are running away from the Republican Party at numbers we've never seen before."

In the 2018 election, Cox said that nationwide, a majority of voters ages 18-30 – 68 percent – voted for Democrats over Republicans. He said that's the widest margin he's seen in his lifetime.

"In Utah, we are not immune from that," Cox said.

The Lt. Governor added that he spoke to a political scientist at a state university who calculated that the same age range of voters in Utah were tipping more toward the Democrats than Republicans, albeit by a smaller margin than the nationwide estimate.

"It's the first time they've had more vote for Democrats than Republicans," he said.

Further illustrating the growing gap between the Republican Party and younger voters, Cox shared an experience involving a university student who asked him, "How can you say you're a Republican and claim to actually care about people?"



Ballot boxes are held up before gathered delegates to show they are empty prior to voting at the 2019 Washington County Republican Party's organizing convention held at Dixie Technical College, St. George, Utah, April 27, 2019 | Photo by Mori Kessler, St. George News

"I'm a conservative and Republican because I care about people," Cox said he replied, before deciding to just listen to what the university student had to say rather than argue political ideology.

"What I realized is that we are responsible for this, because we've done a horrible job behind 'the why' of what it means to be a conservative," he said.

One example of poor explanation Cox cited was Republican support for small government. The university student took that as a sign that Republicans don't care about people because limited government would result in a restriction or loss of the social safety nets and programs government provides for those in need.

"The reason we believe in smaller government isn't small government for small government's sake – it's because government was never designed to solve all of our problems," Cox said. "In fact, it's really, really bad at it."

Instead, he said, Republicans look to the community, families, churches, faith-based organizations and nonprofits as the proper mechanism for solving societal issues and lifting up those in need.

"We have to explain 'the why' behind that," Cox said. "It's not that we don't like people, it's actually that we do like people and we want to help them, and government's just not good at it."

He said the nation's conservative party should also be the one that wants to create equal opportunity for everyone to have a chance at achieving the American dream.



Delegates turn in their votes for various leadership positions up for grabs at the 2019 Washington County Republican Party's organizing convention held at Dixie Technical College, St. George, Utah, April 27, 2019 | Photo by Mori Kessler, St. George News

"We don't care about the color of your skin. We don't care what religion you belong to. We don't care if you were born poor or rich," Cox said. "Everyone should have that same opportunity."

However, he said there is a particular group that is "absolutely underrepresented and has no voice that is being left behind and being forgotten – and that is the unborn."

Cox said he believes future generations will look back on today's society with contempt "because we did not protect the lives of viable babies who were being aborted everyday."

The final issue Cox spoke to the university student about was how free enterprise and capitalism are not "four-letter words."

Free enterprise has brought more people out of poverty than any other system, Cox said.

While acknowledging there is a place for social safety nets for those who need them, he said "the greatest social program ever created in the history of the world is a job. And we need to make sure we're creating more jobs and helping people get those jobs so they can lift themselves up."

As he concluded, Cox said there are currently 675,000 Republicans in Utah compared to 175,000 Democrats. In between them are 550,000 unaffiliated voters.



Larry Meyers,

who was one of six delegates to represent Washington County on the Republican Party's State Central Committee, speaks with a fellow delegate at the party's organizing convention held at Dixie Technical College, St. George, Utah, April 27, 2019 | Photo by Mori Kessler, St. George News

Utah has a Republican super majority right now, Cox said, noting that it hasn't always been that way. "It can happen again if we are not vigilant. If we are not careful," he said. "I will say this very clearly: there is only one party that can destroy the Republican Party here in the state of Utah, and that is us."

The party needs to unite and pull together while also bringing others in, he said, or else the Republicans will lose the legislative majority they currently enjoy in Utah.

As the convention progressed, additional speakers decried socialism while also continuing to voice a die-hard commitment to promoting the caucus-convention system for party nominees over the signature-gathering path.

Attention was also given to [2019's House Bill 136](#), which bans abortions at 18 weeks and was recently signed into law by Gov. Gary Herbert. However, Utah officials are [delaying implementation of the law due to the threat of a lawsuit from the American Civil Liberties Union](#).

Southern Utah Reps. Walt Brooks, Travis Seegmiller and Phil Lyman were among the 18-week abortion ban bill's co-sponsors.

"It is important that we stand up for the sanctity of life," Brooks said.

While addressing delegates at the convention, Rep. V. Lowry Snow said it was hard to understand how Democrats could be very supportive of protecting the lives of some endangered species and yet not feel the same toward an unborn human child.

Convention results



Jimi Kestin was re-elected as the chair of the Washington County Republican Party during the party's organizing convention held at Dixie Technical College, St. George, Utah, April 27, 2019 | Photo by Mori Kessler, St. George News

The majority of elected positions within the county Republican Party were uncontested, with the incumbents being re-elected through acclamation. However, the positions of party chair, treasurer, legislative chair for House District 75 and six spots on the State Central Committee were up for grabs and went to the following members:

County party chair

- Jimi Kestin was re-elected as the party chair in a close race with Lesa Sandberg by a vote of 174-159.

Party treasurer

- Susan Lewis won against John Olsen in a 237-94 vote.

Legislative chair for House District 75

- Raelie Madrid came out ahead of Ferris Emery in a 43-36 vote.

New and returning members of the State Central Committee

- Lesa Sandberg.
- Courtney Sinagra.
- Paul Gooch.
- Larry Meyers.
- Pam Palermo.
- Pat Bradley.