



**West**

THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS

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## Utah State Visit

On February 20-21, CSG West Director, Edgar Ruiz, along with CSG West staff Adrian Alvarado, Anne Power, and Kimberly Clark visited 'The Beehive State' of Utah. 2018 marked the start of the 63rd legislative session which commenced January 22nd and closed (sine die) on March 8th. During the visit, CSG West hosted a leadership and Western Legislative Academy (WLA) alumni dinner, as well as a 'meet and greet' breakfast to promote the 71<sup>st</sup> CSG West Annual Meeting that will take place in Snowbird, UT from September 11th-15th, 2018.

During the 45-day session legislators passed a total of 534 bills. A number of policy topics were considered. Some of the most prominent topics under consideration during the visit included education funding, transportation, and public health/safety.

Adequately funding education is an important issue in many statehouses – Utah is no exception. During Utah's 2017 session lawmakers increased per pupil spending by four percent and approved \$64 million in additional continuous funding for student development and growth. Our Schools Now (OSN) - an advocacy group – raised concerns that this amount was insufficient and began gathering signatures to add an initiative to the 2018 ballot to increase funding through an increased income tax. Representative Rebecca P. Edwards filed [HJR 20 \(Joint Resolution Submitting a Question to Voters\)](#) which proposes to raise gasoline tax by 10 cents per gallon to provide additional public education funding. The resolution passed on both chambers and will be presented to Utah voters in November. Based on the estimated revenue projections from HJR 20, OSN has decided to drop the income tax ballot initiative and lend support to the gas tax.

Legislators passed [SB 136 \(Transportation Governance Amendments\)](#), which will change public transit in Utah by renaming the transit authority and changing governance from a supervising board to appointed commissioners. The bill is sponsored by Senator Wayne Harper and Representative Mike Schultz. Counties will have the option to raise sales taxes to fund transit projects and automobile registration taxes will be increased for alternative fuel vehicles to make up for the difference in fewer taxes from gasoline sales. An estimated \$5 million from gas tax will go to transportation to help secure the matching of any federal funding. The legislation also includes a shift from inter-departmental counsel to that of the Attorney General's office.

Similar to other states, legislators were also working to address the opioid addiction epidemic. Representative Michael McKell and Senator Jim Dabakis sponsored [HJR 12](#), a Joint Resolution calling upon the attorney general to sue prescription opioid manufacturers. The House of Representatives passed HJR 12 by unanimous vote in



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February followed by the Senate with a vote of 26 to 1 in March. Highlighted provisions of the bill include: deceptive marketing practices used by opioid manufacturers, effects of opioids on the state and nation, the impact on Utah citizens, as well as lists of other states and Utah counties that have filed a lawsuit against manufacturers. Other bills related to opioid prescriptions are [HB 260 \(Professional Licensing Revisions\)](#), which would allow certain law enforcement officials access to the controlled substances database for the purpose of identifying any prescriber who is overprescribing opioids; and [HB 446 \(Drug Diversion Reporting Requirements\)](#), which would make it a class B misdemeanor to knowingly fail to report to law enforcement known or suspected health practitioners that are in drug diversion – both bills failed to pass.

There will be several changes and/or retirements and the end of the 2018 legislative session. In the House of Representatives, Speaker Greg Hughes will retire this year along with Representative Rebeca Chavez-Houck, Representative Mike Noel, Representative Justin Fawson, Representative Jeremy Peterson, Representative John Westwood. Representative Ed Redd, Representative Curt Webb, Representative Dixon Pitcher, Representative Gage Froerer, and Representative Becky Edwards. In the Senate, Senate President Wayne Niederhauser will seek re-election for his district, but will not run for Senate President again. Senate retirements include Senator Jim Dabakis, Senator Kevin Van Tassell, and Senator Pete Knudson. One seat is open for U.S. Senate for the 2018 election, with Sen. Orrin Hatch not running for another term.

