



STATE OF UTAH

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State of Elections Address

Lt. Gov. Deidre M. Henderson
October 3, 2024 at 10:00 am
260 Central Campus Dr #2018,
Salt Lake City, UT 84112

Two weeks ago, the FBI intercepted an envelope containing white powder that was mailed to my office from the so-called “United States Traitor Elimination Army.” This individual or organization mailed similar packages to chief election officers in most states. The suspicious powder is being tested and the investigation into this threat is ongoing. But one thing is clear: whether the enclosed substance is toxic or not, this letter was sent with the malicious intent to harm not me or my staff, but you, the voters.

Attacks on our elections and the people who run them are attacks on the political institutions that exist to protect our liberty and free government.

As Utah lieutenant governor, I am by statute the state’s chief election officer. It is my job to oversee elections and ensure that state and federal laws are followed by the 29 independently elected county clerks who run them. Safeguarding the most fundamental right of citizens to vote in free and fair elections is a responsibility that keeps me up at night. These are not the easiest times to administer elections. State law also requires me to provide election information to the public and news media as necessary.¹

Under this banner of stewardship, today I am fulfilling an urgent obligation to provide you with information about Utah elections. I will describe some of the risks to our election processes, outline specific actions you can take to mitigate those risks, and tell you what you can expect in the weeks before and after the election.

Before addressing present concerns, it is important to first look at the past. We learn from history and remembering the principles upon which our nation and state were built is crucial. In fact, this idea is embedded in the Utah Constitution. Article I Section 27 declares that “Frequent recurrence to fundamental principles is essential to the security of individual rights and the perpetuity of free government.”²

¹ UT Code § 67-1a-2(2)(iv)(B), 2024, Utah State Legislature (https://le.utah.gov/xcode/Title67/Chapter1A/67-1a-S2.html?v=C67-1a-S2_2024050120240501), accessed October 1, 2024.

² Utah Constitution Article I Section 27, 1896, 6.

The right to vote is a fundamental principle held dear by our state. There is an inseparable link between free, representative government and the people's ability to choose their representatives. It was a winding path to get where we are today, with all citizens able to vote under equal protections, regardless of who they are or where they live. But this right was hard-won by the people of Utah.

In 1895, a Convention was held in Salt Lake City to draft a state constitution. It was Utah's seventh time applying for statehood. The stakes—and emotions—were high. Twenty-five years earlier, Utah women became the first in the nation to vote under an equal suffrage law. For seventeen years they enjoyed their privilege, until Congress passed a bill outlawing it. Outraged and indignant, Utah women of all ages and political persuasions united toward one goal: to include equal suffrage in the new state constitution.

During the Constitutional Convention, the “ladies” sat among the male delegates on the chamber floor. They had no formal voice in the convention, but they had something more powerful than words. They had presence. Resolve. Most importantly, they knew they were right to demand the equality that representative government requires, and they would not be denied it.

But some people feared that an equal suffrage plank would make the state Constitution too controversial to ratify. It was safer, they said, to leave women out of the Constitution, gain statehood, and then pass a separate suffrage amendment later. One man even suggested that it would be patriotic for the women to request that the suffrage provision be withdrawn altogether, for the good of statehood.

But the women did not budge.

Ultimately the delegates were persuaded that “if the price of statehood is the disfranchisement of one-half of the people...then it is not worth the price.” We risked statehood for equal voting rights, for broader access to the ballot. On January 4, 1896, Utah was admitted to the Union with equal political rights secured in our State Constitution. We were only the third state to do so, and it happened twenty-four years before most women in America could vote.³

For many years, Utah has worked to take politics out of elections. That sounds like an odd claim, but the legislature truly has built a bipartisan system of election administration that focuses on two primary principles: easier access to the ballot, and more secure elections. This system, that values both access and security, has developed slowly and deliberately over time. When it comes to election administration, we as a state have chosen to value good process over partisan talking points, constitutional rights over arbitrary government obstruction.

Utah elections are secure and administered fairly. County clerks are meticulous in their efforts to accurately count all legal ballots, whether they are cast by mail or in person. Not long ago, county clerks and the good local people who ran elections faithfully performed their duties in near anonymity. But today, harassment, intimidation, and threats to election officials are so commonplace that they have become almost unremarkable. This trend should alarm everyone.

³ Utah Constitutional Convention Twenty-Fifth Day, March 28, 1895, Utah State Legislature (<https://le.utah.gov/documents/conconv/25.htm>), accessed October 2, 2024.

This is different than legitimate criticism, calls for reform, expressions of grievance, or dissent. Attacks against our political institutions are not meant to reform, but to undermine. They are not designed to improve processes or laws, but to subvert them; to instill fear and doubt, harass and intimidate, cause confusion, delay, and chaos. And they always serve to advance a political agenda, not the public interest.

Attacks include generating or spreading rumors, misleading information, and false accusations. Such attacks put at risk that fundamental principle of the right to vote that we once valued more than statehood itself. They also distract from instances of true malfeasance that should be dealt with and stir the passions of those who might feel justified taking matters into their own hands.

Over the past few years our election system has been overwhelmed by demands and disruption from individuals who are best described as election vigilantes, who claim to value the constitution and rule of law while violating both. Until recently, it has been easy to dismiss these efforts as fringe, but I have grave concerns that the volume and intensity of their destructive efforts are seeping into the center. If mob rule becomes valued more than the rule of law, we risk losing everything.

Vigilantism is nothing new. Abraham Lincoln cautioned against the dangers of what he called the “mobocratic spirit” back in 1838 and preached the fundamental principle of respect for the rule of law. Mob rule hurts everybody. According to Lincoln, even “the best citizens” are susceptible to the mobocratic spirit because eventually they either give into it or become intimidated into silence. This undermines government institutions, leaving them weak and susceptible to corruption. “Let every American,” Lincoln said, “every lover of liberty, every well-wisher to his posterity, swear by the blood of the Revolution, never to violate in the least particular, the laws of the country; and never to tolerate their violation by others...Let reverence for the laws...become the *political religion* of the nation.”⁴

During the last four years there has been more violence and disruption aimed at our political institutions than we have seen in decades. And while we expect these destructive efforts to continue, we have learned a lot in the past four years and are prepared for it.

I want to make sure you are prepared too.

In the coming weeks, you will hear that the vote has somehow been rigged and judges are playing favorites. But please remember that “heads I win, tails you cheated” is not a foundational principle of a free government.

You will hear reporters and debate moderators asking candidates if they will accept the results of the election—an unthinkable question not too long ago.

⁴ Abraham Lincoln; “The Perpetuation of our Political Institutions: Address Before the Young Men’s Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois; January 27, 1838 (<https://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/lyceum.htm>), accessed October 2, 2024.

You will hear that vote-by-mail is less secure than in-person voting, and that counting ballots by hand is more accurate than machine. Both claims are demonstrably false.

After the election you will hear rumors of supposed voting irregularities, which are often easily explained, but the truth is much more boring than the rumor.

You will be frustrated by having to wait several days—maybe even weeks before you know the results of some races. Please remember that process and order are necessary components of free and fair elections. It takes time for ballots to be counted, adjudicated, audited and the election certified. All these processes are open to the public.

You will also hear of problems that occurred in various voting jurisdictions, and you know what? That will be true. Any system run by tens of thousands of individuals across thousands of decentralized voting districts throughout the country will experience human error. It happens. Every time. It always will. But please extend some grace to your friends and neighbors in Utah who run our elections. They want nothing more than to ensure that your vote counts accurately. And it will.

Today I call on all Utahns to step up for the good of our state and country with three specific actions:

First, I ask you to doubt the doubters. Questions and concerns are welcome, but if someone is spreading salacious rumors that shake your confidence in our elections, stop and ask yourself what their motivation could be. Do not participate in undermining public trust in our elections by spreading rumors or unfounded accusations. Doubt the doubters before you doubt the entire election system.

Second, commit today to accept the results of the election, no matter what they are. Every race has a winner and loser. You will not like every outcome. But despite what pundits and politicians on both sides are claiming, no matter who wins in November, this will not be our last election. The next one is just around the corner. This is how we do things in the United States of America.

And third, take your vote into your own hands. You are ultimately responsible for your own ballot. On October 15, county clerks will mail ballots to active registered voters. Go to vote.utah.gov to register to vote, update your address, learn about what is on your ballot, and sign up to get notifications sent straight to your phone so you will know when your clerk mails your ballot, receives your ballot, and counts your ballot.

As the election nears, you will see more information from my office and your county clerks. Please share it. It is our responsibility as citizens of this state and country to ensure that we are spreading true and accurate information to counter the attacks and harm inflicted by self-interested people who care more about their own agendas than they do about your Constitutional rights. This effort will take all of us doing our part. I love this state and our nation. I am honored to be in this position of trust and work every day to uphold the laws and faithfully serve you, the people of Utah.