

# Five County Association of Governments

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**[THESE MINUTES WERE APPROVED BY THE STEERING COMMITTEE ON MARCH 8, 2023]**

## MINUTES FIVE COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2023 at 1:30 P.M.

**MEETING HELD AT: FESTIVAL HALL; COMBINED ROOMS 5&6; 105 N. 100 E., CEDAR CITY, UTAH.**

**MEETING WAS ALSO BROADCAST TO THE PUBLIC VIA A ZOOM VIDEO CONFERENCE.**

### MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Commissioner Celeste Meyeres  
Commissioner Gil Almquist  
Commissioner Jerry Taylor  
Commissioner Wade Hollingshead  
Hurricane City Mayor Nanette Billings  
Milford City Mayor Nolan Davis  
Tyler Fails  
LaRene Cox  
Commissioner Paul Cozzens  
Escalante City Mayor Melani Torgersen  
Cedar City Mayor Garth Green  
Town of Orderville Mayor Lyle Goulding  
Lauren Lewis (*attending electronically*)

### REPRESENTING

Kane County Commission  
Washington County Commission  
Garfield County Commissions  
Beaver County Commission  
Washington Co. Mayor's Representative  
Beaver County Mayor's Representative  
Beaver County School Board  
Washington County School Board  
Iron County Commission  
Garfield County Mayor's Representative  
Iron County Mayor's Representative  
Kane County Mayor's Representative  
Iron County School Board

### OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

Bryan Thiriot  
Gary Zabriskie  
Cindy Bulloch  
Heath Hansen  
Kyle Wilson  
David Busk  
Chris Homer  
Dave Gardner  
Bergen Eskildsen  
Kelly Stowell (*attending electronically*)

### REPRESENTING

Five County AOG Executive Director  
Five County AOG Deputy Dir./Chief Technology Officer  
Congressman Chris Stewart  
Senator Mike Lee  
Senator Mitt Romney  
Utah Department of Workforce Services  
Washington County School District  
Washington County School District  
Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands  
Executive Director at Center for Education, Business, and the Arts (CEBA)

**AGENDA ITEM I. WELCOME BY CHAIR.**

At 1:30 p.m. sharp, Garfield County Commissioner Jerry Taylor, as Steering Committee Chair, after recognizing that there were thirteen voting members in attendance, which was well beyond the required eight to constitute a quorum, welcomed everyone to the Five County Association of Governments Steering Committee meeting for February 8, 2023.

**AGENDA ITEM II. INTRODUCTION OF NEW MEMBERS.**

The Chair introduced the newest members of the Steering Committee: Cedar City Mayor Garth Green, as the Iron County Mayor’s Representative; Town of Orderville Mayor Lyle Goulding, as the Kane County Mayor’s Representative; and Lauren Lewis, representing the Iron County School Board. The Chair asked everyone else to introduce themselves.

Following the introductions, Mr. Gary Zabriskie, Deputy Director at the Association, mentioned that Mr. Henrie Walton was at the Legislatures and has asked that he be excused. It was also noted that Ms. Lisa Livingston, who represents the Kane County School Board, was excused from this meeting.

**AGENDA ITEM III. ROTATION OF THE CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR.**

Commissioner Jerry Taylor, as outgoing Chair, sated that it was his pleasure to “hand the gavel” over to the new Steering Committee Chair, Kane County Commissioner Celeste Meyeres. The new Chair noted that the clockwise rotation each year of the Chair and Vice-Chair. She noted that Washington County Commissioner Gil Almquist will serve, this year, as Vice-Chair.

**AGENDA ITEM IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.**

The Chair asked Mayor Lyle Goulding to lead the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**AGENDA ITEM V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE JANUARY 11, 2023 MEETING.**

The Chair asked if everyone had a chance to read those minutes, and if they had any questions, comments, or concerns and seeing none called for a motion for approval of the minutes for the January 11, 2023 Steering Committee meeting.

**Commissioner Gil Almquist moved to approve the minutes as presented. The motion was seconded by Mayor Nolan Davis.**

The Chair, after asking for any needed discussion, and seeing there was none, called for a vote.

**The vote of the members was unanimous in the affirmative to approve the minutes as presented.**

**AGENDA ITEM VI. REGION’S UTAH PERMANENT COMMUNITY IMPACT FUND BOARD (CIB) 3rd TRIMESTER PROJECT APPLICATION REVIEW BY THE STEERING COMMITTEE.**

The Chair turned the floor over to Mr. Gary Zabriskie to cover this agenda item. Mr. Zabriskie explained that there was only one application for this third and final trimester of the CIB fiscal year and it is from St. George City. He said that they are applying for a new city hall and parking plaza

construction project that they announced publicly just a short time ago, at the end of 2022. He said that the City has held several public meetings, and also a formal public hearing, for the CIB application. Mr. Zabriskie stated that he had previously e-mailed all of the Steering Committee members with detailed information on this proposed project, so they all had a bunch of information on it. He explained that he did this since this is one of the largest projects that we have seen come in for CIB funding. They are asking for \$20 million as a loan from the Community Impact Board, which means they will pay that loan fully back with interest. He said that they are matching that funding with \$25 million of city funds, so it is a \$45 million project. He explained that a few years ago, the City came into the CIB with an application to remodel their existing city office, adding some space to it, and also adding on significantly to the the police station up on the hill, including a parking garage on the site. He explained that when COVID hit, the City put that project on a back burner for a short time, and decided to rethink things. He said that they considered a bunch of different options and had a lot of focus meetings, and ultimately decided that the best solution was to go downtown, which Mr. Zabriskie said, as a professional land use planner, was a great idea for them. He said that the CIB does have loan money and it will be interesting to see how this plays out. He explained that there is another large CIB application from another region during this same trimester, but the CIB tries to fund projects and especially projects where the money is loaned out. Mr. Zabriskie said that our board can either support a project, remain neutral, or not support a project. He said that this action of bringing these CIB projects to this board is because it is in the statute for CIB that the Regional Association of Government, where a project is located, must chime in on a project. He said the review and determination is not done by staff; it is done by an AOG's governing board. He said that it is up to this board how they want to respond to this one. Mr. Zabriskie informed the Chair that this action to determine the Steering Committee's level of support requires a motion and a vote. He again emphasized that the Committee could vote to support, remain neutral, or not support a project. He said that this board has done all three of those options over time, that this role by the Steering Committee is not a rubber stamp to all applications, that it really depends on the specific project. Hurricane City Mayor Nanette Billings said that she has been busy with a lot of the St. George City council members, and they are in favor of it.

The Chair called for a motion.

**Mayor Billings moved that the Steering Committee support the St. George City application to the Utah Permanent Community Impact Fund Board (CIB). That motion was seconded by Commissioner Gil Almquist.**

The Chair, after asking for any needed discussion, and seeing there was none, called for a vote.

**The vote of the members was unanimous in the affirmative to support the St. George City application to the Utah Permanent Community Impact Fund Board (CIB).**

#### **AGENDA ITEM VII. A-95 AREAWIDE CLEARING HOUSE REVIEW - SITLA PROJECT.**

The Chair turned the time over again to Mr. Gary Zabriskie, to discuss an areawide clearinghouse review for a SITLA property in Iron County. He explained that the proposal is a water line running from a private water well to a livestock water trough located on School Trust land. He said that the pipe will be about 5000 ft in length on Trust Land and will be placed on the edge of an existing two-track road. Mr. Zabriskie said that he made contact with Iron County to address any concerns they may have. He said that the response he got back from Iron County is that they appreciate the

opportunity to comment on the proposal. The County said that this is an important range improvement project for grazing in this area, as the installation of a waterline and trough will provide for better management of grazing resources. The County said that drought conditions have plagued this area during the past year and these range improvements will help improve grazing and other resources in the area. Mr. Zabriskie said that Iron County said that they are pleased that SITLA is working with the livestock owners on proposals such as this project. Mr. Zabriskie said that the recommendation from staff to Steering Committee is that they vote to be supportive of this project, as Iron County is supportive as well.

The Chair called for a motion.

**Commissioner Hollingshead moved that the Steering Committee support the proposed SITLA Project #85208 Range Improvement Project #968, as presented. That motion was seconded by Commissioner Paul Cozzens.**

The Chair, after asking for any needed discussion, and seeing there was none, called for a vote.

**The vote of the members was unanimous in the affirmative to support the proposed SITLA Project #85208 Range Improvement Project #968, as presented.**

**AGENDA ITEM VIII. U.S. DOT GRANT AWARD TO FCAOG – DEVELOP COMPREHENSIVE SAFETY ACTION PLAN (SAFE STREETS FOR ALL).**

The Chair turned the time over to Mr. Bryan Thiriot, Executive Director at the AOG, to discuss this agenda item. Mr. Thiriot referred everyone to a page in the packet that was the announcement of the award of this grant. He said that the United States Department of Transportation just awarded a \$1 million grant to the Five County Association of Governments to develop a comprehensive safety action plan to plan for safer streets. He referred the members to look on the back of their packet for the announcement. He said that this funding is narrow, in that it is just within the boundaries of Washington County. He said that he understood that Cedar City also got a grant for this, but much smaller. He said that the main objective and goal of this is to identify real safety needs, traffic needs within the street systems. He said that as that safety plan comes together, we could be looking at perhaps \$50 million coming in to address those, but the plan has to come first to identify the needs and solutions. He said he understands that Cedar City got \$60,000 to do a safety plan within the boundary of Cedar City. He said that he believes that there is going to be one plan, and Myron Lee with the Dixie Metropolitan Planning Organization (DMPO) will kind of lead out on that. He said that this grant money is only for planning, and is not for actual construction and pavement. He said that comes later after the plan is finished. He said that after the plan is finished, UDOT will be looking to see if they can leverage funding to go towards this. Mr. Thiriot said that we are just learning about it right now. He said that the DMPO Technical Advisory Committee and DMPO Transportation Executive Committee each meet once a month and they will learn more about it because it will be dealing with Washington County. Mr. Thiriot thought it was all of Five County, but Five County was the umbrella organization that was wrapped up into this. Commissioner Hollingshead asked who wrote this grant, Five County AOG or Washington County? Mr. Thiriot explained that the grant was written by the Dixie Metropolitan Planning Organization that is housed at the Five County AOG.

**AGENDA ITEM IX. STATE OF UTAH – BUSINESS SURVEY UPDATE.**

The Chair again turned the time over to Mr. Thiriot, to discuss this agenda item. Mr. Thiriot referred the Board to a separate handout which is a business survey from Camoin Associates. He said that this is a business survey that went out statewide and this data is what is being collected to feed into our regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (or CEDS) document. He said he is hoping that the Board members will read through all of it, and if they have questions, to let him know. He said that the data will feed into our regional strategy. He highlighted page 45, which described the overall business environment within the Five County region. He said that one can see the respondents said a majority of Five County and Uintah Basin respondents felt that airline services were poor, or worse. He said that out of all of the other AOGs, that was the feeling and mood. He referred the Board members to page 46 under Business Environment. He said that those in the Mountainland AOG (which is primarily Utah County) and Bear River AOG (in the Logan/Brigham City area) respondents had the most positive feeling of the entrepreneurial environment, while the Five County AOG region was the least positive. Questions were asked, rhetorically, on how they targeted businesses? A concern in the methodology was brought up that the survey is not very representative of Five County area, since they only surveyed 300 statewide.

Mr. Thiriot referred the Board to page 47 where it shows that Five County and Mountainland respondents felt the most negative about their access to natural gas. He said that on page 48 under Business Environment, it showed that Five County respondents were the least positive about their access to electricity. He finished his short review of the survey by referring the Board to page 67, Government Outreach, where it was mentioned by the respondents that businesses in the Five County and Wasatch Front are the most likely to have been contacted by state or local government in the past three years to discuss their needs and challenges. Mr. Thiriot's encouragement was that the Steering Committee members look this survey over, but he cautioned to do so somewhat with a grain of salt, because he does not think it is fully representative. Commissioner Cozzens asked who paid for the survey. Mr. Thiriot said that the state of Utah paid for it.

Commissioner Taylor said he would be interested to see if the Five County AOG could do the same survey ourselves. He said it could ask the same questions, but get a more fair sample from every county, to see if this statewide survey is real or not. Mayor Billings said that her concern was that there were only 300 respondents for this entire state survey and then there are 29 counties, which means ten people from each county, or 200 people from the Wasatch Front and then one from our region, but we do not know how it was distributed because it does not say. Commissioner Almquist said that it is worth noting that at least those many people feel that way.

The Chair, seeing no further discussion, moved on to Agenda Item X.

**AGENDA ITEM X. WASHINGTON COUNTY TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL.**

The Chair turned the floor over to Ms. LaRene Cox, Washington County School Board member, who introduced the presenters of this agenda item: Dave Gardner, Career and Technical (CT) director from the school district, and Principal Chris Homer. Mr. Gardner said that the response from students and families has really kind of caught them off guard. He said that the initial numbers of students they are expecting is more than 500 today and they think it will be closer to 600 students in year one. He said they have had lots of applications and continual support and families that keep

saying that their kids are excited about education for the first time in their life. He explained that there are other technical schools in the state of Utah, but they usually go to their home high school and then they are bused to say, a Granite Technical Institute, or a Catalyst in Davis County for a few classes, and then they spend most of their time at their home high school. He said that this will be the first in Utah because we will be doing academic and all the CT and technical stuff in one building. He said that they want kids that fit with this CT model of education versus the boundary schools. A three-minute-long video was shown. He explained that this new school is eight years in the making. He said that this is not a new idea, it is just new in Utah. The Las Vegas area has seven of these CT "academies" and they are building an eighth. He said Washington County's is mostly patterned after a school in Houston, Texas, called Career and Technical High School, and that was very much the inspiration for this. He said that these schools are not new ideas, but they are gaining popularity. He said that the school in Houston only lets about one out of every three students get accepted and their waiting lists are very long. He said that with just this first year, Washington County School District thinks they are going to be right there because it is going to be one of those things that kids really, really want to get into, and it fills out. He handed out a paper that shows the eight pathways. He said that they really see this as a technology-oriented school, and they are looking for kids that are a good fit and that is what they are hoping for. He described several of the pathways and in speaking about the early childhood education tract he said that they are building a preschool inside of the school so that they will have a focus on early childhood education. He explained that if a student finds that they don't fit into a particular pathway, they will try to move them into another pathway, but if they just cannot find a fit or there is no room, they will just go back to their boundary school or home school.

He explained that there is some money for extra equipment and things like that. He explained that Washington County currently has a construction program and will have a home in the Parade of Homes this year, and have for four years in a row. He said that juniors and seniors can choose if it is construction they want to go into. He said that it was just another pathway. He also said that they have a hands-on culinary arts program. He said they built an unbelievably nice commercial kitchen that is commercial grade and as nice as it gets.

He described a number of PowerPoint slides showing the current status of the construction and finished the presentation by answering a small number of questions from Board members. The Chair thanked the group for the presentation and said they look forward to the new school's opening.

#### **AGENDA ITEM XI. WOOD BIOMASS IN REGION.**

The Chair opened this agenda item on wood biomass in this region for board discussion and possible action. The chair turned the time over to Mr. Bergen Eskildsen, Wood Utilization Coordinator at Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands. Mr. Eskildsen gave a background about the Economic Development Opportunity Initiative and how they have been involved as the state. He said he is helping different businesses and entrepreneurs get connected to different local, state and federal resources and is trying to stimulate economic capacity for new market opportunities for wood products and forest products. He said that the Forest Service has not traditionally had people that want to come and take wood waste material, but now they are seeing a lot more interest in biofuel producers. He said they have been working with one company, in particular, called Juniper Fuels, who is actually looking at this area in particular with the juniper trees and the Forest Service land to utilize a lot of that material. Mr. Eskildsen said they are working with the Forest Service just

because they have not done that before, and he said while they cannot sell it for free, they already said that they can do it for a very nominal cost. Mr. Eskildsen answered a number of questions and the consensus of the Board was that he would speak with Mr. Bryan Thiriot and coordinate with him on potential grant applications.

The Chair thanked Mr. Bergen Eskildsen for appearing at the meeting.

## **AGENDA ITEM XII. UTAH LEGISLATIVE SESSION - ON-GOING DISCUSSION.**

The Chair moved into this agenda item which is a continuation of the Utah legislative session ongoing discussion. The Board discussed B and C roads in House Bill 175 to provide a one-time appropriation for improvements. It was discussed that part of the problem is the big cities along the Wasatch front use southwest Utah as their playground when they come down here and the counties and cities here have to maintain the roads that they drive on.

It was discussed that there has been quite a bit of pushback on the bill that would essentially do away with the county recorders.

Mr. Zabriskie brought up a bill that would affect both counties and cities, that is on affordable housing that puts a stick, a very big stick, if an entity does not comply with the current requirements for an annual or semi-annual update of the Affordable Housing Plan status and if that is not done in the timeframe the state mandates, the entity would be fined. Mr. Zabriskie explained that this is the first time Mr. Zabriskie has ever seen the state of Utah say they are going to issue a monetary fine to a political subdivision for not complying with the law.

Mayor Billings said that they were trying to find a little bit of money in the State Parks Road Fund because they have state parks located fully within Hurricane City. She said that the road to Santa Hallo is the only road that is a city street that goes to a state park. The Chair said that there are county roads that go to state parks, like Coral Pink Sand Dunes. Mayor Billings mentioned the EMS bill.

The Chair thanked everyone for the discussion and said that if there was interest, they could talk further, informally, about the legislative session once the meeting was over.

## **AGENDA ITEM XIII. CONGRESSIONAL STAFF UPDATES.**

The Chair turned the time over for Congressional Updates.

**Mr. Kyle Wilson** with Senator Mitt Romney's office said it has been a slow week in the Senate. He said that AUMs are staying at \$1.35 for anybody to whom that is relevant. He explained that Pine Valley is one of 21 priority landscapes designated in the United States to receive extra funding and some expedited NEPA, should it be necessary. He said that it includes prescribed burns, some timber sales, to try to convert a lot of that pinion juniper areas into grass, improve the ecology of the mountain, improve the watershed, and the runoff thereof. He said that this is a huge win for the area. He said that it is a mountain that he takes a lot of personal ownership of. He said he really likes to see that happen. He said that one of the reasons there is so much interest from private

industry about timber sales, for example, is he thinks it is going to take all hands-on decks to complete that volume of work, so the more partners who are willing to participate in that, the better. He explained that 2023 is a farm bill year. He said that Democrats are teeing up a fight over climate initiatives that could potentially be included in the Farm Bill, which the delegation obviously does not want to see. He said that is something that they are monitoring and are pushing back against. Lastly, he said that some may be familiar with the Trust Act, but the Senator is hoping to get the Trust Act included in part of the debt ceiling negotiation. He said they are not sure that is going to happen, but they are crossing their fingers. He said that the Senate only votes on about a third of federal spending, as the other two thirds are compulsory, they are entitlements. He said that the Trust Act creates some commissions, and some of those entitlements are going to not be solvent in the next ten or fifteen years. He said that the Trust Act would create commissions that were alluded to in the State of the Union address the night before to look at some of those entitlements and to see how they can shore them up so they do not run into a problem.

**Mr. Heath Hansen**, with Senator Mike Lee's office said that going back to the wood products discussion, as a delegation they are always happy to help any way they can with that. He said that they had a call with the regional forester last week, or two weeks ago, and they really tried to drill down to this point where it seems that the Forest Service says they have all this wood available, are putting it up for almost nothing, yet the delegation is hearing from industry that they cannot access the wood. He said that the delegation is really trying to figure out what the obstacles are there. He said from the Forest Service's perspective, at least, it really comes down to the lack of capacity to do the work. He said that the way the regional forester explained it is that they are able to offer ten-year contracts and are able to offer these timber sales for almost nothing. He said that the problem is the Forest Service has received an influx of money now and they need to spend that money now and they cannot wait for five or ten years for industry to finally get around to doing the work. He said that anything that the state, the counties, local government, anyone can do to build up that capacity, the Forest Service has the money. He said that the Forest Service seems very willing to work with industry, but we have got to come up with the capacity to allow the Forest Service to turn to industry, rather than just doing prescribed burns or burning whatever it is the are slashing. Mr. Hansen said that anything that they can do to help with on the capacity side, please let the delegation know, because that really seems to him to be the biggest hurdle. Commissioner Almquist asked Mr. Hansen if he had called Fish Lake Lumber to see what their capacity is to get some of this wood? He said that Fish Lake is always looking for wood everywhere. Mr. Hansen said that what we are trying to figure out is why the Forest Service seems to be saying they are trying to sell it, but industry is saying they cannot find enough. Mr. Hansen said that they are trying to figure out where the miscommunication is. He said he knows they have been having those conversations for a long time, but for some reason the solution alludes them. He said that is why they are still trying to work with the Forest Service and industry to try and figure it out, but it seems that capacity is one of the major hurdles.

Mr. Hansen said the Senate finally got their organizing resolution put together, so they have their committee assignments. He said that Senator Lee will remain on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, the Judiciary Committee and the Joint Economic Committee. He said that in a bit of a surprise, and it seems to be a retaliation from Senator McConnell because Senator Lee did not vote for Senator McConnell to be the minority leader, so Senator McConnell kicked him and Senator Rick Scott off of the Commerce Committee, which he is disappointed about, but he will be on the Budget Committee, just no longer on the Commerce Committee. Mr. Hansen brought up the State of the Union address that happened the night before. He said that to him it was the most unique State of

the Union speech he has ever experienced. He said that Senator Lee invited Governor Cox to be a guest. He said that Senator Lee and Governor Cox gave a response to the State of the Union, and the State of Utah and Senator Lee seem to be on the same page with regard to the State of the Union, which proves why we need to get back to federalism with the states, especially Utah, to let us govern ourselves. He said the Senator and Governor Cox said that we do not need the federal government telling us how to do things. He again said Senator Lee and Governor Cox are on the same page there and they are going to continue to work together to try to bring federalism back.

The Chair mentioned that the transfer of public lands would be something the County would jump at, if there was the chance for that to have some momentum. Commissioner Taylor thinks they could manage their lands and have that capacity. Mr. Hansen said that Senator Lee is making that argument since he has been in the Senate and unfortunately it takes a critical mass of senators. The Chair told Mr. Hansen that she hears what Mr. Hansen is saying but that they are kind of trying to gain some traction with a AG's office to bring some things to the Supreme Court and everything might be a good time for it, but that it is just a little bit right now kind of like a Scooby Do cartoon where they run before they start moving!

Commissioner Taylor said that they don't want Utah to be treated special, but he does want Utah to be treated the same as other states have been treated. He said that because they gave Wyoming and Alaska an exemption, he believes that the people of Utah deserve that same exemption. Mr. Hansen answered to them that they are absolutely right. He said that every public lands package that has come up during Senator Lee's tenure he pushes for that, but unfortunately is railroaded every time, but he will continue to fight for that because, especially when it comes to the Antiquities Act, Utah suffered more than its share. The Chair said that she knows that the Senator tries to stay in his lane, but if he is talking with Governor Cox anyway, maybe the Governor could talk to Attorney General Sean Reyes so that we could just get a little momentum that we cannot generate on our own at this moment.

Mr. Hansen said that the country hit a \$31.4 trillion debt ceiling back in January, and the Treasury Department has been executing emergency measures to pay the bills and he thinks they can continue to do that until about June 4<sup>th</sup>. He said that at that point, if they do not raise the debt ceiling, the federal government will be unable to pay its debt. He said that the big debate on Capitol Hill right now is the debt ceiling. Democrats just want to do a clean increase, while many Republicans think that would be incredibly irresponsible, considering that the debt ceiling was \$6 trillion in the year 2000. He said that it is now almost \$32 trillion, and we keep raising it, and raising it, without any meaningful spending cuts. He explained that Senator Lee sent a letter from the Senate to President Biden stating that he, and the 23 other senators who sign the letter, will not agree to any debt limit increase unless there are also substantive spending cuts, or controls on spending moving forward. He said that, unfortunately, that is only 24 members of the Senate, meaning there is a lot more that did not agree to that, so that was disappointing. He said, however, that Senator Lee is continuing to work with Republicans on the House side, and in the Senate to try to get meaningful spending cuts, or control spending, within this debt ceiling negotiation. Senator Lee has his Price Act, which would limit the amount of spending the Senate could approve in any period where inflation is above 3%, and he would like to see that included, but he is open to any and all ideas to get spending under control because we cannot continue down this road. Mr. Hansen said that we have already seen the inflationary effects of the spending, and we just cannot continue down this road. He said we need more people to acknowledge that, and actually stand up and do something about it. Commissioner Cozzens said that he is "only a county commissioner" but

something he has learned in his life is that you cannot 'borrow' your way out of debt. Mr. Hansen said that the fact of the matter is we as a nation have benefited from very low interest rates on our debt, but the second that interest rates start to go up on the that \$31.4 trillion, even a small increase in the interest rate and our interest payments skyrocket at that point and our debt becomes impossible to get under control. Commissioner Cozzens said that the way we throw around millions and billions and trillions when talking about money and the debt, it is interesting, that if you compare money to time, a million seconds is twelve days, a billion seconds is 32 years, a trillion seconds is 32,000 years. He said that just gives all of us perspective on how much money we are talking about in the debt.

**Ms. Cindy Bulloch**, with Congressman Chris Stewart's office, said that Congressman Stewart has been given his committee assignments. She said he is on Appropriations and within Appropriations, he is on State Foreign Operations and related programs, he is on the Defense Subcommittee and Interior, which is Environment and other related, so those are some pretty important Appropriations committees. Ms. Bulloch said that the Congressman has also been put on the new "Weaponization of Government" committee that is investigating some of the overreach of government programs and organizations that are stepping out of line. She said he is also on the Intelligence Committee, so he is on some really important committees. She said that Congressman Stewart does agree that we are spending too much money and at the same time if they are going to do appropriations, he is going to be there fighting that he can get as much as he can back in Utah. She said that he knows better than to say okay that he disagrees, and we are not going to take any money. She said that once they have decided that budget, when funding goes in for community projects, he will be there fighting to get as much as he can for his district, and for Utah. She said to that, they are getting ready for community project funding. She said that they are hoping that that the application period will be opening up soon. She said that while they are in recess in DC, they have some staff members who are going to be holding some office hours at the Utah state Capitol from the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, and 24<sup>th</sup> of February. She said that if any counties or communities are looking at community project funding they will set up specific meetings where those entities can come in and one-on-one say: "Hey, we need to do a fire project, a fire station, or: "What do we need to get ready?" or: "We have got this water project", or: "We've got this road project" and have some one-on-one. She said to reach out. She said that they will do office hours, and if you just show up, they will figure it out.

The Chair thanked the staff of the senators and congressman for their update reports.

#### **AGENDA ITEM VIII. STATE AGENCY UPDATES.**

The Chair turned time over to Mr. David Busk with the Utah Department of Workforce Services who said that when he was in the Air Force some 100 years ago, they really preached situational awareness. He said that you have got to know what is going on around you. He said that he has some informational awareness information for the Steering Committee members today. He said that it was good to hear about the CT High School and some of those things. And we talked about unemployment rates, and we talk about that a lot. He said that he provides unemployment updates every time, but he wanted to put one thing into perspective. He explained that in 2021, just in the five county region, the southwest region, there were 105,250 open jobs and at the same time in that year, there were a total of 10,580 unemployment insurance claims; and just putting things in perspective fast-forwarding into 2021, there was in the same area, 114,666 open positions; so that increased by almost 10,000, and the number of unemployment claimants went down by almost

3,000, to 7,381. He said that when you hear about unemployment and people on unemployment, just know that there is way more jobs out there than we have people to do them. He said that is why these pathways that are being developed are so important to help tap into people that are on the sidelines in the labor market, and those that are not participating in the labor market. He said that he thinks it is important to find ways to bring them back in so that we can continue to grow economically, so that is one thing. He said that the second thing is, due to the passage of the Omnibus Bill, those Covid-19 pandemic programs, and the money associated with that pandemic, are ending. He said that Sunday the 5<sup>th</sup> of February was the last day for the Rental Assistance Program, so they are no longer taking applications for that, and that program is going away. He said that the SNAP emergency allotment or the Max Benefit program is going away, so you are going to see people now. He said that the rental assistance will be going back to normal. He said that those are the things that are happening with some of the Medicaid programs. He said those are going to be phasing back over time, but he just wanted everyone to know the dates for those, so that if you hear things, you know what is going on. He said that this was really all he had to share today. Commissioner Taylor asked Mr. Busk what the unemployment rate was in Garfield County currently? Mr. Busk said it was 5.9% in Garfield County, and the rest of the other counties in southwest Utah are between 2.3% and 2.7%

The Chair thanked Mr. Busk for his presentation.

#### **AGENDA ITEM IX. UNIVERSITIES AND TECHNICAL COLLEGES UPDATES.**

Mr. Zabriskie said that, as was mentioned earlier, Mr. Henrie Walton was at the Utah Legislature and had asked to be excused. He said that there was no representative from Southern Utah University, DixieTech, or Southwest Technical College in attendance at the meeting or on Zoom, though they were all invited.

#### **AGENDA ITEM X. CONSIDERATION OF LOCAL AFFAIRS.**

Mr. Bryan Thiriote asked the Chair to go back to the biomass item because he had just read through the checklist and one check box is the governing board authorizing entity to apply and administer the Rural Business Development Grant, including the name and title of the person authorized to sign the grant documents. He said that rather than have a special meeting, he suggested that the Steering Committee do a motion to have the Chair be authorized to do that.

The Chair called for such a motion.

**Commissioner Almquist moved that the Steering Committee authorize Commissioner Celeste Meyeres, in her role as Chair, to sign any application documents required for the biomass grant. That motion was seconded by Commissioner Taylor.**

The Chair, after asking for any needed discussion, and seeing there was none, called for a vote.

**The vote of the members, giving the stated authorization to the Chair, was unanimous in the affirmative.**

**AGENDA ITEM XI. ADJOURNMENT**

The Chair asked if there was any other business to address? Seeing there was none, she called the meeting adjourned at 3:29 p.m. and thanked everyone for attending and participating.

These minutes were transcribed and typed by Mr. Gary Zabriskie, Deputy Director at the Five County Association of Governments.

The minutes were approved, unanimously, by the Steering Committee at their March 8, 2023 meeting in Cedar City, Utah.