

The Insiders Trying To Kill Utah's Caucus System (Update – Jowers, Deseret News, And Plan B)(Update With Plan C)

Many would like to know who exactly is behind the push to do away with the Utah Caucus system which is the 'great equalizer' for run-of-the-mill citizen influence in politics (more on that in **a separate post** (<https://utahrattler.wordpress.com/2011/05/16/equalizer-the-neighborhood-caucus-system/>)). Here's your answer: the elite political class (known as the "Mainstream Republicans"). I have obtained a copy of an email purportedly from the group including a list of members attending an organizational meeting at the swanky Alta Club. I have redacted contact information and added in some of their affiliations (my notes/redactions are in brackets). The email was sent out last year (by LaVarr Webb of the powerful Exoro Group) and many names should be very familiar (including to us who have watched the back room dealing and ram through of HB116 and other legislation):

Subject: Mainstream Republican Lunch
Date: Thu, 20 May 2010 07:10:03 -0600
From: [Redacted]
To: [Redacted]
CC: [Redacted]

All,

We're very much looking forward to the Mainstream Republican Lunch tomorrow, noon, Alta Club. This will be fun! When Larry Lunt and I first discussed getting a group together we thought we might have half a dozen or so. Our invitation struck a very responsive chord and a lot more people are interested in attending than we anticipated.

This demonstrates the high level of concern many Utah Republican leaders have about the tone of our politics and the need for the mainstream majority to assert itself in the selection of our elected officials. We need to ensure that a small, but vocal, faction doesn't control the nomination process or dominate legislative activity. We are really excited to have you involved. It's a terrific group.

We want to have an open discussion tomorrow and hear all of your concerns and ideas. However, with such a large group we will need to be a little bit disciplined or we will never reach any conclusions or get to action items. We need to be certain we reach some conclusions on two items: **1. Whether we should tackle the nomination process;** [Emphasis added] 2. Whether we should form a real advocacy group to achieve our objectives.

We're pleased that Kirk Jowers has arranged to have a California friend attend who has put together a mainstream Republican coalition in California that has become very influential in California politics. We'll hear from him tomorrow.

Here is a very general agenda to help guide the discussion:

1. Welcome and introductions: Larry Lunt
2. The current political climate
 - a. Mood of voters
 - b. Lack of civility
 - c. Lack of ability to work together to address real problems
 - d. Legislative concerns: leadership elections, immigration, redistricting, etc.
3. **The nomination process: Try to change?** [Emphasis added]
4. Do we need an organization? Utah's Mainstream Conservative Coalition?
5. The California experience
6. If we create an organization ...
 - a. Mission, structure & governance
 - b. Statement of principles
 - c. Recruitment (500 leaders)
7. Next steps: Working group?

Also, Larry had graciously offered to pick up the tab for the lunch. However, that was when we expected six or seven to get together, not upwards of 30. So I'm suggesting that some of us help with the cost of lunch, or each of us pay for our own lunch.

Here's who will be with us at lunch. There might be one or two others who RSVPed verbally that I didn't get on the list.

Larry Lunt [Organizer, **former Utah Republican Chairman, campaign aide to Senator Hatch** (<https://href.li/?http://www.ksl.com/?nid=148&sid=452658>), also former member of Utah State Legislature and Director of Lunt Capital Management (see John Lunt entry link)]

Greg Bell [**Current Lieutenant Governor of Utah** (<https://href.li/?http://www.utah.gov/ltgovernor>)]

Scott Anderson [[Zions Bank President & CEO \(https://href.li/?http://www.zionsbank.com/bio_anderson.jsp\)](https://href.li/?http://www.zionsbank.com/bio_anderson.jsp)]

Olene Walker [[Former Governor of Utah, Governor Leavitt's Lieutenant Governor, Governor Candidate \(lost in convention\) \(https://href.li/?http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olene_Walker\)](https://href.li/?http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olene_Walker) and [expressed concern about caucus system \(pages 4-5\) \(https://href.li/?http://www.strengthenedemocracy.org/uploads/2009/09/minutes-7-31-09.pdf\)](https://href.li/?http://www.strengthenedemocracy.org/uploads/2009/09/minutes-7-31-09.pdf)]

Chris Cannon [[Former multi-term Utah Congressman \(https://href.li/?http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chris_Cannon\)](https://href.li/?http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chris_Cannon) ousted by voters in a primary election]

John Lunt [[President of Lunt Capital Management \(https://href.li/?http://www.luntcapital.com/new/luntcapital/default.asp\)](https://href.li/?http://www.luntcapital.com/new/luntcapital/default.asp)]

Bob Garff [[President of Ken Garff Auto Group \(en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_H._Garff\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_H._Garff)]

Doug Wright [[KSL Talk Show Host \(https://href.li/?http://dougwright.ksl.com/\)](https://href.li/?http://dougwright.ksl.com/) – currently, KSL is Utah's biggest media outlet and owned by the LDS Church]

Jeff Edwards [[President & CEO of Economic Development Corporation of Utah \(EDCUtah\) \(https://href.li/?http://edcutah.org/aboutEDCUtah.php\)](https://href.li/?http://edcutah.org/aboutEDCUtah.php) – lobbies government to use your tax money to benefit favored businesses]

Dan Jones [[Pollster \(https://href.li/?http://www.djasurvey.com/\)](https://href.li/?http://www.djasurvey.com/) (now part of (<https://href.li/?http://www.ksl.com/?nid=148&sid=9332020>) [Cicero Group \(https://href.li/?http://www.cicerogroup.com/\)](https://href.li/?http://www.cicerogroup.com/)), [UofU professor, Hinckley Institute \(https://href.li/?http://www.hinckley.utah.edu/scholarships/danjones.html\)](https://href.li/?http://www.hinckley.utah.edu/scholarships/danjones.html)]

Randy Shumway [[Dan Jones and Cicero Group Management Team \(https://href.li/?http://cicerogroup.com/about-us/management-team.html\)](https://href.li/?http://cicerogroup.com/about-us/management-team.html)]

Stan Parrish [[Former President of Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce, SLCC Board of Trustees, Former Chief of Staff for Senator Hatch \(https://href.li/?http://www.slcc.edu/president/boardOfTrustees.asp\)](https://href.li/?http://www.slcc.edu/president/boardOfTrustees.asp)]

Frank Switter [[Former State Chair of Republican Party, On Ally Bank Board, Finance Committee of Various Campaigns, Salt Lake Convention & Visitors Bureau Board \(https://href.li/?http://www.frankswitter.com/\)](https://href.li/?http://www.frankswitter.com/)]

Dave Hansen [[Former Utah GOP Chairman, Senator Hatch Campaign Manager \(https://href.li/?http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700087788/Utah-GOP-Chairman-Dave-Hansen-to-step-down-to-help-Hatch-campaign.html\)](https://href.li/?http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700087788/Utah-GOP-Chairman-Dave-Hansen-to-step-down-to-help-Hatch-campaign.html) note: he recently defended the caucus system]

Kirk Jowers [group organizer, [Director, U of U Hinckley Institute \(https://href.li/?http://www.hinckley.utah.edu/about/staff.html\)](https://href.li/?http://www.hinckley.utah.edu/about/staff.html) – big proponent of getting rid of caucus system (<https://href.li/?http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/opinion/49801142-82/utah-state-system-convention.html.csp>) (see updated link) – says caucus system [shortchanges women \(https://href.li/?http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700030064/Does-Utah-caucus-system-shortchange-women.html\)](https://href.li/?http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700030064/Does-Utah-caucus-system-shortchange-women.html) because it is an insiders game (er, this group is all insiders with hardly any women). Edit: Linked SL Trib article was moved: see SL Trib archive: [Utah's way of picking candidates robs voters \(https://href.li/?http://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=9827885&itype=storyID\)](https://href.li/?http://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=9827885&itype=storyID) or [web archive link \(https://href.li/?https://web.archive.org/web/20101130164316/http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/opinion/49801142-82/utah-state-system-convention.html.csp\)](https://href.li/?https://web.archive.org/web/20101130164316/http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/opinion/49801142-82/utah-state-system-convention.html.csp).]

Jowers' guest from California [Unnamed – I understand his purpose was to assist with strategies and help bring the California model to Utah. UPDATE: The guest is Kelly Burt as revealed by a 2018 GRAMA request of Greg Bell's state email (I have a copy). He was [involved in the California Republican Party and a "National Campaign Finance Co-Director for Mitt Romney's presidential campaigns" \(https://href.li/?https://web.archive.org/web/20170628160759/http://charityvision.net/board-of-directors/\)](https://href.li/?https://web.archive.org/web/20170628160759/http://charityvision.net/board-of-directors/)]

Kristen Jowers [spouse – Worries about [under-representation of women as delegates \(https://href.li/?http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700030064/Does-Utah-caucus-system-shortchange-women.html\)](https://href.li/?http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700030064/Does-Utah-caucus-system-shortchange-women.html) (heh, this group is also seriously underrepresented...)]

Sharlene Hawkes [[ACSEND National Advisor, 1985 Miss America \(https://href.li/?http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sharlene_Wells_Hawkes\)](https://href.li/?http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sharlene_Wells_Hawkes)]

Becky Edwards [[State Representative – Bountiful, North Salt Lake \(https://href.li/?http://www.utah.gov/house/detail.html?i=EDWARRP\)](https://href.li/?http://www.utah.gov/house/detail.html?i=EDWARRP)]

John Edwards [Representative Edwards' spouse]

Lew Cramer [**President, CEO of Utah World Trade Center** (<https://href.li/?http://www.wtcut.com/about-us/lew-cramer/>) (partnered with Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce)]

Carlton Christensen [**Community Development Representative for Zions Bank, Salt Lake City City Council, Utah League of Cities and Towns, Downtown Alliance** (<https://href.li/?http://www.slcgov.com/council/D1/pages/bio.htm>)]

Doug Foxley [**Foxley-Pignanelli Government/Public Affairs Firm** (<https://href.li/?http://www.fputah.com/political.html>) and influential lobbyists – Look at the **powerful list of clients** (https://href.li/?https://secure.utah.gov/lobbyist/lobbysearch?page=lobbyist_search_list&id=23) (may have to click “refresh” and scroll down on you browser)]

Frank Pignanelli [Staunch Democrat with **Foxley-Pignanelli Government/Public Affairs Firm** (<https://href.li/?http://www.fputah.com/political.html>) and influential lobbyists – Look at the **powerful list of clients** (https://href.li/?https://secure.utah.gov/lobbyist/lobbysearch?page=lobbyist_search_list&id=47) (may have to click “refresh” and scroll down on you browser)]

Dave Buhler [Former State Senator, Former Chair of Salt Lake City Council, Hinckley Institute Alumni]

Derek Miller [**Governor Herbert's Chief of Staff** (<https://href.li/?http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/home/50924748-76/bigelow-herbert-staff-budget.html.csp>) also formerly in **Office of Economic Development** (frequently worked with EDCUtah), worked for US House of Representatives ([https://href.li/?http://utahpulse.com/view/full_story/15721048/article-Derek-Miller--a-New-Managing-Director-at-GOED--Works-Hard-for-Utah\)\)](https://href.li/?http://utahpulse.com/view/full_story/15721048/article-Derek-Miller--a-New-Managing-Director-at-GOED--Works-Hard-for-Utah)))]

Jack Sunderlage [**CEO of ContentWatch, Founding Chair of the Utah World Trade Center** (https://href.li/?http://utahpulse.com/featured_article/jack-sunderlage-utah-international-executive-year)]

Bob Sykes [**Robert B. Sykes personal injury law firm** (<https://href.li/?http://www.sykesinjurylaw.com/>). Please, please tell me I'm wrong on this one...]

Mac Christensen [**Mister Mac?! Co chaired Senator Hatch's Campaign and Democrat Sam Granato's campaign** (https://href.li/?http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mac_Christensen) when he opposed Senator Lee (who defeated Senator Bennett in convention – those darned caucus meetings!]

Swen Howard [No info yet]

Natalie Gochnour [**VP of Policy/Communication Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce** (https://href.li/?http://www.slchamber.com/page/sandbox/view/natalie_gochmour), **VP of Policy/Communications at Leavitt Partners** (<https://href.li/?http://leavittpartners.com/our-team/natalie-gochmour/>) (Mike Leavitt's group), Hinckley Institute Alumni **biography** (<https://href.li/?http://www.hinckley.utah.edu/alumni/spotlight/Alumni%20Spotlight%20Gochnour.pdf>)]

Chuck Akerlow?? [**Developer** (https://href.li/?http://www.zoominfo.com/people/Akerlow_Charles_89022324.aspx), **President, Proterra** (<https://href.li/?http://www.bbb.org/utah/business-reviews/real-estate-developers/proterra-development-group-in-salt-lake-city-ut-2008133>)]

LaVarr Webb [Long time political insider, Exoro Group founder, sent this email – see links at end of email] There were a couple of others who attended. Scott Anderson and Bob Garff did not attend.

Mike Leavitt [**Former Utah Governor** (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mike_Leavitt)]

Nolan Karras [**Governor Candidate, Utah State Board of Regents, Scottish Power Board of Directors** (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nolan_Karras)]

Robin Riggs [**Exec VP Governmental Affairs , Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce** (https://href.li/?http://www.slchamber.com/page/sandbox/view/robin_riggs)]

Rich McKeown [**CEO of Leavitt Partners** (<https://href.li/?http://leavittpartners.com/our-team/rich-mckeown/>)]

Ruland Gill [**Former Questar VP of Government Affairs** (<https://href.li/?http://people.forbes.com/profile/ruland-j-gill/34003>)]

Charlie Johnson [**Senior Advisor, Leavitt Partners** (<https://href.li/?http://leavittpartners.com/our-team/charlie-johnson/>)]

David Jordan [**Utah Board of Regents, Commercial Litigation Attorney** (<https://href.li/?http://>

[//www.utahsbr.edu/bor01b.html](http://www.utahsbr.edu/bor01b.html))]

Rich Nelson [Not sure, maybe this guy? (https://href.li/?http://www.heraldextra.com/news/local/article_f8da66ef-b33d-5b9f-a8fd-c52cb07edc8c.html) or is it this guy? (https://href.li/?https://secure.utah.gov/lobbyist/lobbysearch?page=lobbyist_search_list&id=1940) (may have to hit “refresh”)]

Steve Mecham [Zions Bank Lobbyist (https://href.li/?https://secure.utah.gov/lobbyist/lobbysearch?page=lobbyist_search_list&id=1856) (may need to hit “refresh”) and Former Chief of Staff to Utah Governor, Attorney (<https://href.li/?http://www.cnmlaw.com/attorneys/stephen-f-mecham/>)]

Ralph Atkin [Not sure, maybe the SkyWest founder J. Ralph Atkin?]

LA VARR WEBB The Exoro Group, www.exoro.com (<https://href.li/?http://www.exoro.com/>)

Utah Policy Daily, www.utahpolicy.com (<https://href.li/?http://www.utahpolicy.com/>)

Utah Pulse, www.utahpulse.com (<https://href.li/?http://www.utahpulse.com/>)

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Some others that did not attend but are believed to be supporters **include** (<https://href.li/?http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/opinion/50139026-82/group-republican-gop-former.html.csp>) (note: this is from Paul Rolly and he's not the most reliable – UPDATE: The Hinckley Institute has **also posted Rolly's article** (https://href.li/?http://hinckley.utah.edu/events/media/2010/08_21_2010_Paul_Rolly_Voices_for_mode.pdf) [pdf] giving it more credence – I assume they wouldn't do so if it were inaccurate about these attendees etc.):

... former Republican vice chairman Todd Weiler [sic], West Valley City Mayor Mike Winder, Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce director Lane Beattie...

This isn't any sort of grassroots effort. It's more a who's who of politically-connected insiders and they don't want any of the 'unwashed masses' rocking the boat. Note: Weiler **denies being at the Alta Club but didn't/wouldn't answer if he's involved with the Mainstream Republicans** (<https://utahrattler.wordpress.com/2011/12/13/republican-delegates-beware-davis-county-caucus-killers-jowers-starts-machine/>).

UPDATE (5/24): Some additional links and caucus opponents' Plan B. Jowers appears to be spearheading the effort to kill the caucus system based on his past positions. However, there may be more to the story than that. Jowers is rumored to have aspirations to become Utah's Governor but is concerned he won't make it out of a convention. I also have heard that both he and his wife were delegates and supporters of Senator Bennett and quite upset when he lost in convention.

Based on the attention given to Jowers position and caucuses by the Deseret News (including an editorial), it appears that news organization may also like to see them go away. Be aware that Joe Cannon (brother of ousted Representative Chris Cannon) was the Editor when all but Mero's article was published and **remains on the Editorial Advisory Board** (<https://href.li/?http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700061740/Deseret-News-editor-to-leave-newspaper-after-3-years.html>).

Desert News headlines that “**...delegates are out of step with most Utahns** (<https://href.li/?http://www.deseretnews.com/article/print/700027505/Poll-Utah-state-delegates-out-of-step-with-most-Utahns.html>)”. The majority of the article is devoted to opposition of the caucus system and Jowers complains about the system and bemoans Olene Walker's loss (despite the fact that she entered the race late and ran a poor campaign). Interestingly, at that time, Webb defends it. Webb also defended the system in yet another Deseret News piece written with Pignanelli entitled “**Is it time for Utah to drop the delegate system?** (<https://href.li/?http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700028673/Is-it-time-for-Utah-to-drop-the-delegate-system.html>)”

In the Deseret News, Paul Mero (president of the highly politically connected and active lobbying group, the Sutherland Institute) pens an article repeatedly calling those attending caucus meetings “**shrill voices**

<https://href.li/?http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700108243/Partisanship-hinders-Utah-immigration-solution.html>”.

So what is the caucus opponents “Plan B”? I think Kirk Jowers gives that away in his op-ed in the Salt Lake Tribune titled **“Utah’s way of picking candidates robs voters** (<https://href.li/?http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/opinion/49801142-82/utah-state-system-convention.html.csp>)”:

Utah’s parties must (1) make primary elections more common and accessible by lowering the convention’s current 40 percent vote threshold to 20 percent...

Also attacking the caucus system and backing Plan B, is none other than the Desert News Editorial Board in an editorial entitled **“A political system out of touch with the public** (<https://href.li/?http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700028671/A-political-system-out-of-touch-with-the-public.html>)” (note: based on the content, it seems like Jowers penned the editorial):

Changing that requirement to 20 percent would allow more candidates to survive to a primary...

Plan B is to let anyone who gets 20% of the vote go to a primary – that would virtually guarantee a primary which is exactly what the insiders/big donors want.

UPDATE (10/12): The Levitt/Jowers group (McKeown, Leavitt, Jowers, and Webb) are now floating plan C (**Leavitt group discuss new ways to choose political candidates** (<https://href.li/?http://www.ksl.com/?nid=960&sid=17628870>)): collect signatures to get to force a primary. You can already collect signatures to get on the general election ballot, but I guess they want a nice, low threshold to force a primary and (as above) let their money/influence do the rest.

UPDATE (2020): Finally got around to updating this with the name of Jowers’ California friend” (look for Kelly Burt above in the email I pasted with comments). So glad they went with someone who “put together a mainstream Republican coalition in California that has become very influential in California politics”. Clearly, that was a resounding success and the GOP has a permanent majority in California since 2011.

Really, over the last nine years, it has become evident that most of the ‘mainstream’ establishment/corporate Republicans preferred to let the left run things and pretend to be conservative (engage in political kabuki/failure theater) so they dupe conservatives into donating to their causes and cruises (Bill Kristol was the king of this game). Trump turned over their apple cart and many became ‘Never Trumpers’ when they realized he actually enacts conservative policies they “supported” prior to his election.

Oh, and spoiler alert, California is anything but a GOP majority, it’s a leftist playground.

Posted on **May 12, 2011** **July 8, 2020** by **utahrattler** Posted in **Campaigns, Local Government, State Government** Tagged **Caucus, SLChamber, Sutherland**.

Related

On To Plan C: Political Elites Next Option To Kill The Utah Neighborhood Caucus November 28, 2011 In "Campaigns"

Republican Delegates Beware: Davis County Caucus Killers (Jowers Starts Machine)? December 13, 2011 In "Campaigns"

Salt Lake Chamber Of Commerce, Kirk Jowers Hold Session On Killing The Neighborhood Caucus August

10, 2011In "Campaigns"

15 thoughts on “The Insiders Trying To Kill Utah’s Caucus System (Update – Jowers, Deseret News, And Plan B)(Update With Plan C)”

1. Pingback: [Utah GOP Giving Sutherland Institute Preferential Access To Delegates? « Utah Rattler](#)
2. Pingback: [On To Plan C: Political Elites Next Option To Kill The Utah Neighborhood Caucus « Utah Rattler](#)
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6. Pingback: [SL Chamber, Political Insider Backed “Education First PAC” Officially Funding Shumway « Utah Rattler](#)
7. [JOSHUA DANIELS \(@JALDENDANIELS\) SAYS:](#)
[February 20, 2012 at 9:44 am](#)

Apparently, much like the “tea-party,” you were born (politically speaking) after the 2008 election. Let me jog your puny memory—Republicans, including popular state legislators in relatively republican areas, LOST. This trend will continue if the silent majority of moderate thinking do-gooders (ie—Matheson voting mormons who abhor conflict and extremism in politics) feel that the GOP nominees are too “extreme”—whatever that means. (this will be the strategy of Dems in Utah going forward—to paint the GOP as extreme). In other words, while I am not ashamed to be a Conservative, we need to make sure our candidate selection process is NOT overly controlled by a small vocal minority lest we be construed as out of touch with a majority of voters. If we want the GOP to grow we must incorporate broader involvement in the candidate selection process. Simple electoral strategy, that is all. Not some evil conspiracy. Grow up, get a memory, let's win some elections.

↪ Reply

[UTAHRATTLER SAYS:](#)

[February 20, 2012 at 22:21 pm](#)

Look at the blog for starters; I've been around long before 2008. I'm willing to bet I was politically active before you were born. If you are concerned about involvement by others, they just need to show up at caucus meetings. Additionally, the principles the tea party espouses are more widely shared than many insiders realize.

It may also help to be careful with your tone/snark if your goal is to bring greater involvement in the caucus system. The condescending tone of your comment is something that will turn people off to attendance.

↪ Reply

8. Pingback: [Buy My Vote: Elites Pour Money In To Crush Citizen Candidate Selection | Utah Rattler](#)
9. Pingback: [Utah’s Neighborhood Caucus System And Democracy In America | Utah Rattler](#)
10. Pingback: [Gov. Herbert: Thou Shalt Be Duped And Like It | Utah Rattler](#)
11. Pingback: [2019 Legislative Lesson: Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce, Swamp Consolidates Stranglehold](#)

On Utah – Utah Rattler

12. Pingback: **The Utah Swamp Sneers, Calls Citizens “Fringes” For Daring To Oppose Them – Utah Rattler**
13. Pingback: **A Bill Utah's Political Grifters Will Certainly Get Behind – Utah Rattler**
14. Pingback: **Minority Wins: Utah's Failed Primary System Graciously Brought To You By The Swamp – Utah Rattler**

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