

UTAH PRIMARY » JUNE 25

How Phil Lyman says he'll address energy, water scarcity and education funding if elected governor

GOP incumbent Gov. Spencer Cox declined to answer questions about issues Tribune readers said were important to Utah.

By BRYAN SCHOTT
The Salt Lake Tribune

Facing his first gubernatorial challenger since being elected in 2020, Utah Gov. Spencer Cox is squaring off against a familiar face. Phil Lyman, who was nominated by more than two-thirds of Republican delegates this spring, is making a pitch to primary election voters that Utah needs a change in leadership. The winner of the June 25 primary will face lawyer and state lawmaker Brian King in November's general election.

To better understand the candidates' positions on issues readers told The Salt Lake Tribune were important in this primary, a reporter reached out to Cox and Lyman with a battering of questions on topics from water policy to education funding. Lyman shared his answers with The Tribune, while the incumbent governor declined to answer. Lyman's answers have been edited for grammar, clarity and length.

Question #1 » Utah's largest electricity provider has canceled plans to replace its coal-fired power plants with nuclear power and has walked back comments about investing in clean energy. Should Utah, while it actively encourages expanding housing and business development, also be looking for more sustainable and less fossil fuel and carbon-dependent energy sources? If coal and gas are the answer to today's power needs, what about tomorrow?

Phil Lyman » Nuclear energy is the future, but with the onerous federal



Incumbent Republican Gov. Spencer Cox, left, faces GOP challenger Phil Lyman in the June 25 primary.

regulatory environment it is likely decades away. In the meantime, Utah should lean into its abundance of coal, oil, and natural gas. The hydrogen and geothermal research going on is important, but we would be better served to devote our efforts towards our existing power sources, while pushing full force on development of thorium, molten salts, and uranium driven nuclear reactors.

Spencer Cox » Declined to answer.

Question #2 » Yes or no: Is climate change adversely impacting Utah?

Phil Lyman » No.

Spencer Cox » Declined to answer.

Question #3 » Water scarcity continues to be a challenge for the state. Recent legislation has attempted to conserve water and get more to the Great Salt Lake and Colorado River.

Should Utah do more to subsidize homeowners to conserve water? Should laws require large users to pay more for water? What other steps should state government take to deal with water scarcity?

Phil Lyman » The answer to water scarcity in Utah is to manage our forests. We live in a desert so water will always be a concern, but powerful interests are manipulating policy under the guise of a water crisis — denigrating farmers, pushing for higher and higher user fees, requiring metering and telemetering, centralizing all control under the state, and using public resources to buy out water shares that should be dedicated to farming. All the while promoting the false narrative that our forests are off limits for management. The boundary that defines Utah means something and Utah should manage the forests to maximize water production.

Spencer Cox » Declined to answer.

Question #4 » Yes or no: Do you support building the Lake Powell Pipeline?

Phil Lyman » Declined to answer.

Spencer Cox » Declined to answer.

Question #5 » The cost of housing is rising faster than wages in Utah as housing is becoming less and less affordable.

What can be done to close the gap between wages and rent/mortgage costs? Does the state government have more to do to assist Utahns with housing?

Phil Lyman » Utah government policies that favor large developers have created much of the housing shortage we are experiencing. Throwing more public money at favored developers will not solve the problem. In fact it will make it worse by continuing to reward high density housing in already densely populated areas. The government should lessen regulation, make more reasonable building codes, and work to open up a tiny portion of the federal land that could and should be available for families to build homes on.

Spencer Cox » Declined to answer.

Question #6 » For or against: Are you voting for or against the constitutional amendment that removes the requirement that income taxes be used for education and social services? Explain your position.

Phil Lyman » Against. This is an important constraint on the legislature. It is unfortunate the school boards and Utah Education Association have supported changes to the ear mark on income tax in the past.

That said, if Utah would vote to

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eliminate income tax, I would support replacing the money with revenue that would be derived from production taxes. Utah should be incentivized to produce and to extract, not simply to increase the tax burden through income and property taxes.

Spencer Cox » Declined to answer.

Question #7 » Who are you supporting and voting for in the 2024 presidential election?

Phil Lyman » Donald Trump

Spencer Cox » Declined to answer.

Question #8 » Yes or no. Will you commit to accepting the results of the June primary election no matter the outcome?

Phil Lyman » I will commit to verification of results no matter the outcome.

Spencer Cox » Declined to answer.

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