

Pride video

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able to be out and open in my work." But the head of Utah's Department of Government Operations, appointed by Gov. Spencer Cox, refused to sign off when he heard of his human resources asked in May 2023 if he could post the video online for Pride Month.

Government Operations Director Marvin Dodge cited a new content policy from the governor's office in an interview with The Salt Lake Tribune last June about his decision to quash all pride social media posts. In an email to Dodge, Division of Human Resource Management Director John Barrand said he was part of "the working group to stand up the Content Framework." As part of that process, Barrand wanted Dodge's approval before posting the pride video on social media and his agency's website.

Throughout the preceding year, the human resource division had shared documentary-style recordings of employees for Hispanic Heritage Month, Native American Heritage Month, Black History Month, Women's History Month and Veterans Day.

The four-minute video "has been edited to remove anything that may be deemed politically charged" in compliance with the new content policy, Barrand noted in the email.

"These videos are produced in a way that allows the employees to tell their stories, on their terms," Barrand wrote to Dodge. "We ask them to share their struggles and their love for public service. It is our hope that these stories can help others feel or find a place of belonging and a workplace they can call 'home.' (Division of Human Resource Management) is in the people business first and foremost. This is not political, but human. And we want to continue to tell their stories."

Barrand signed off the email saying, "We hope that you will find these stories as a way to share our stories."

Utah government is the fourth-largest employer in the state — trailing only Intermountain Healthcare, University of Utah, and Wal-Mart Associates — and the majority of its employees are concentrated in Salt Lake County, according to the Department of Workforce Services.

An estimated four-in-100 Utah adults openly identify as LGBTQ+.

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Kennyn Royal shows off her pride as she attends the Rainbow March and Rally, part of Utah Pride Week, earlier this month.

according to the Williams Institute at University of California, Los Angeles. Statistically, that means the state likely employs hundreds of LGBTQ+ people.

Emails obtained through a public records request did not include Dodge's response. Deputy Executive Director Marilee Richins, the media point of contact for the office, confirmed Thursday that Dodge made the call not to post the video. He also did not approve a video recognizing Asian American and Pacific Islander employees.

"It was Marvin who established a policy under his administration to not recognize any particular group of people," Richins wrote in an email. "This really had nothing to do with Pride Month. He feels that considering the role of Government Operations, which is to provide back end services to state agencies at the most cost effective use of taxpayer dollars, our position is to be respectful, accountable to and grateful for every taxpayer independent of race, religion, orientation, or gender."

A GROUP OF EMPLOYEES WHO OFTEN FEEL LIKE THEY ARE NOT SEEN OR SUPPORTED

When The Tribune reported last year that Dodge, who was appointed in April 2023, ordered his communications director to delete separate all-ready-posted pride images from state government social media pages, he said in an interview, "The content

review piece came out of the governor's office... but frankly, that wasn't part of my decision and I'm going to accept all of the blame and fault for this one."

Dodge continued, "And I'm not trying to pick on gay Pride Month or any other issue. Frankly, I approach this as I have throughout my career — with the perspective of taxpayers as the primary focus of concern."

Government operations and its several divisions — whose responsibilities range from managing human resources to overseeing the state's archives and records — can no longer post in reference to any holidays, Dodge said at the time.

"My concern with any holiday — and I'm not saying I'm anti-religious or anti-anything, but it seems these days, no matter what gets posted, somebody has a burr in their saddle... and we shouldn't go out of our way to irritate people," Dodge said. "So if we celebrate Christmas, and our Christmas things, then we irritate the atheists. If we talk about Pioneer Day, we irritate the anti-Mormon people. Obviously, there's a lot of conversation around gay pride and that irritates the conservatives."

In the months since the revelation, Dodge eliminated the department's communications director position. Google Chat messages from 2023 previously reported on by The Tribune between the then-communications director and a human resources employee who curates the state's employer brand questioned Dodge's decision.

"I would argue that supporting

pride as [a] month is not a community group, but rather a group of employees who often feel like they are not seen or supported. Same with Black History, Women's history, etc." the human resources employee wrote.

"And he doesn't want any posts on those either," replied the communications director.

The messaging shift came as Cox departed from his past Pride Month declarations, omitting any mention of the acronym LGBTQ+. The governor has continued to drift away from his previous declared support for the LGBTQ+ community as he faces reelection, this year declaring June a "Month of Bridge Building."

WHAT LGBTQ+ STATE EMPLOYEES SAID IN A VIDEO ABOUT PRIDE

To protect the employees' identities, The Salt Lake Tribune is only posting a transcript of the video and has redacted the employees names and workplaces.

State employee 1 » Pride is connection — it's community.

State employee 2 » When we share pride, then we help love ourselves and help show each other that it's OK to be queer.

State employee 3 » Thinking of this last Pride, I think there was like over 100,000 people. I mean, that growth, that change — it fills me with such hope. And it fills me with such love of our community.

State employee 1 » I went to Pride for the first time when I was 19, and it felt like I was seeing color for the first time. And it was amazing realizing I wasn't alone. I was a part of something much bigger.

State employee 3 » I grew up not feeling like I had a voice. And then in high school, I took a theater class, and I realized it was a safe place for me to have a voice.

State employee 2 » I came out really in high school, when the group I was working with that taught sex education taught me all these identities. And they really made me feel welcome because it was mostly a group of other queer people in there. I really enjoyed coming out and finding myself and feeling like I had a welcoming space to be.

State employee 3 » I'm very happy to be able to be out and open in my work. From that early age, I was able to just say, like, 'Oh, this is who I am.' I can be myself. I don't have to hide anymore. And so then I could give better of myself — I could give my full self. Service has always been a thing that's important to me. I wanted to know the people of the community. And working in this position and working for the state, I feel like I really get a chance to do that.

State employee 1 » I wanted to be a part of something bigger, and that's really what my position with [this state agency] has given me. It has allowed me to work with people who care about what it is that they're doing, people who are doing the hard work for a bigger and more equitable future. I think I just want to be the adult I wish I knew when I was a kid, you know? When I was that scared 13-year-old just pretending I was someone else, putting walls around myself. I wish I could be that adult that I needed.

Meeting other queer folks who are happy, that gave me hope that I could be happy as well, that I could be open and accepted and supported as well. And everyone deserves that — everyone deserves to know that they can have a happy future.

State employee 2 » Identities are here to stay. It's a part of who we are, and it's a way to show people that they're welcome, that they're included — making people feel like they have a space to share their lived experience in the state and making people feel like they have had a voice in the state.

State employee 3 » And I'm hoping provide such much joy to the state where there are young kids like who I was, that are frightened, that feel like they have some safety. I'm lucky that I had a family that truly believed in love as the foundation of everything and that to matter what, and who I presented to them, they were going to love me.

But there are people out there who do not have this luxury. There are people who are shunned by their families, there are people who are shunned in their work, there are people who have to hide their authentic self. And we all miss out when those people can't bring themselves fully. And if we can't embrace them, how are we going to grow? How are we going to become a better state?

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Innovative learning at Utah State: How the ASC is shaping future tech leaders

By Jon M. Huntsman School of Business

Utah State University's Analytics Solutions Center (ASC) is redefining technology and data analytics education. The ASC, a part of the Jon M. Huntsman School of Business, aims to empower students through hands-on, real-world challenges, becoming both a hub of innovation and an economic driver for its external partners.

"We want to be the premier center in the Intermountain West for applied academics at the forefront of data analytics and technological innovation," Dr. Douglas Derrick, the ASC's director, said. "The ASC is committed to experiential student development, providing a vibrant curriculum, experiences, and mentorship that are unique. If higher education is going to stay relevant, we must provide differentiated experiences for our students."

The ASC's experiential learning model allows students to apply academic knowledge to real-world challenges, enhancing their educational journey and preparing them for the modern workforce. Wes Smith, a student at the ASC, shared, "My experience

was not just educational; it was transformational in terms of career readiness and understanding what working on a high-functioning team in the industry is like."

The ASC is also a significant economic contributor, providing tremendous value to its external partners by bridging academia and industry. These public/private partnerships enhance students' educational experiences and benefit external partners, adding to the region's economic vitality. Many organizations of various sizes sponsor projects in the ASC, allowing students to be paid for their efforts and providing exceptional returns on investment for the partners.

The ASC has collaborated with companies such as Meta, The Larry H. Miller Company, Zions Bank, NuvoH2O, and Monometric. Mike Bailey, Founder of the Social Capital Lab at Meta, commented, "We had an incredibly positive experience working with the ASC, and they exceeded all of our expectations. The projects were complex and required solving problems from multiple angles, including developing and

ABOVE RIGHT: (USU ASC) ASC Open Forum Meeting, where students share updates on exciting projects currently in progress.
ABOVE LEFT: (USU ASC) Utah State hosted the 2024 Association for Information Systems (AIS) Student Chapter Leadership Conference, where students from all over the United States gathered for workshops and competitions.
RIGHT: (USU ASC) Industry Panel, where panelists Carter Rees, Madison Sperry, and Ryan Beus discussed the power of leveraging LLMs in data careers.

validating advanced ML models, finding data errors, developing impact stories, and creating visualizations and interactive tools. The ASC team delivered on all areas beyond what we were expecting and ahead of schedule."

Besides benefiting external sponsors, the ASC is becoming a hub for technological innovation, with multiple businesses spinning out from ASC students and faculty. The ASC is dynamic and forward-thinking, embracing change and pursuing innovation to stay at the cutting edge of technology and analytics.

Hope Johnson, an ASC student, launched her company, Metric Tracking Solutions (MTS), with mentorship and a grant from the ASC. MTS is a professional fieldwork tracker for Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). To become a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), one must obtain 2,000 hours of supervised fieldwork under a current BCBA. The requirements are specific and difficult to track, typically taking

two years to complete. Despite this, the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) does not provide any road map to track these hours, leaving individuals to manage this complex task independently. MTS aims to remove this barrier to entry into the field.

Johnson explained, "The ASC has been instrumental in starting my business. Without their support, MTS would not exist. The mentors here are incredibly intelligent and always eager to help, even with projects they aren't directly mentoring. The knowledge we gained while working on this project has been transformative for our careers, and we couldn't have learned it all without the support of the ASC."

Utah State University's Analytics Solutions Center is driving experiences-based learning in higher education. With its student-centered approach, commitment to innovation, and strategic focus on real-world applications, the ASC is educating the next generation of leaders in technology and analytics and significantly impacting the region's landscape.