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Rocky Anderson Addresses the Humanists of Utah

On March 8, 2001, the Humanists of Utah were addressed by the most progressive mayor in the history of Salt Lake City, Ross “Rocky” Anderson.

The mayor was introduced by veteran chapter member, Rolf Kay, who provided a brief biography: Ross Anderson was born in Logan, Utah in 1951, received a Bachelor’s degree magna cum laude in Philosophy from the University of Utah, a law degree from the National Law Center at George Washington University, and was elected mayor of Salt Lake City, taking office on 4 January 2000.

Mayor Anderson looked out at the very full Eliot Hall and smiled. “It’s heartening to see this many humanists in Salt Lake City.”

Rocky began his discussion of the challenges of being the CEO of Utah’s largest city by referring to the need for inclusiveness. “We need to value the strength that diversity can bring to our community.”

He spoke of the need for gathering places, such as the town square and the new library: “We need to create more gathering places to bring communities together.”

The mayor mentioned the challenge of listening and responding, a problem addressed through various interactions with the residents. At present there are Saturday mornings with the Mayor, often at local small businesses; News and Community conferences, attended by City department heads: and one-on-one meetings.

Rocky also described taking unpopular stands. He has committed himself to studying the issues, which led to the termination of the participation of Salt Lake City in the DARE program. His research had revealed that DARE-despite its popularity, “sacred cow” status, and the investment of over \$700 million over the life of the program-was a failure. He consulted data from the Center for Drug Abuse Prevention, the Department of Education and the Surgeon General. He relied upon the research in his decision. “This isn’t religion. This is supposed to be science here.” He even compared DARE’s inadequacy to Utah’s sex education programs, referring to them as “sexless sex education.”

Despite the difficulties, Rocky loves being the mayor of Salt Lake City, valuing it even above the Congressional seat he once campaigned for.

“You have to have passion for this kind of work. I know I have the heart and passion for this job.”

The mayor concluded his talk to a standing ovation. A lively question and answer session followed.
