

KUTV: Huntsman Proud Of First Year In

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Huntsman Proud Of First Year In Office

SALT LAKE CITY Gov. Jon Huntsman is describing his first year in office as a success as he prepares an ambitious agenda for 2006.

Many victories the Republican cites from the past 12 months are environmental. There was a state ban on accepting higher-level nuclear waste, labeled B and C, and his firm ``No'' to the expansion of the state's only nuclear waste disposal facility, Envirocare.

He takes pride, too, in progress made persuading the federal government to put a stop to another nuclear waste facility in Utah that is being sought by the Skull Valley band of the Goshute Indians on tribal land in Tooele County.

Huntsman is also proud of his role in securing a settlement between the state and environmental groups and others that sued to stop Legacy Parkway, after a costly legal battle delayed construction for years.

Overall, the governor ``has done a tremendous job of hitting a couple of big issues and sticking with them,'' said Kirk Jowers, head of the University of Utah's Hinckley Institute of Politics.

But it's the coming year, Jowers said, that will determine how Huntsman rates as a governor.

``He's given himself as much potential as he could,'' Jowers said. ``There's been nothing really bad that's happened to him, and he's got a budget surplus and a lot of popularity.''

Some battles have yet to be won, or even fought publicly. Huntsman acknowledged he wants to see

the state's liquor laws changed to allow private clubs the option of doing away with memberships.

Selling the idea of permitting the state's members-only drinking establishments to become bars is not an easy task. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which had no comment on the issue, traditionally opposes liquor by the drink.

``No one has said no, and therefore it is a work in progress," he said. ``When you look at alcohol reform, that would be the most important area of change . . . although I would tell you that is something that cannot be done in a single year."

The LDS Church, the governor said, has not told him what to do on this or anything else.

``I haven't been directed on any issues," he said. ``I've had some very good conversations with the First Presidency, and President (Gordon B.) Hinckley was in my home last week. We talked about I won't get into the details some of the issues on my agenda. It was very good."

Tax reform might be one of those issues. The LDS Church has already issued a statement calling for Utah taxpayers to continue to be allowed to deduct their charitable contributions on state income tax returns.

Huntsman originally came out with what he called a ``fairer, flatter" tax plan that would have eliminated that and other deductions, including for home-mortgage interest and larger families, in order to lower rates.

His plan has since been modified to restore the deductions and is approximately the proposal that the state's Tax Reform Task Force will send to the 2006 Legislature for action.

Huntsman, an active Mormon whose father is a member of the LDS Fifth Quorum of the Seventy for the Utah Salt Lake City area, said he understands he's ``elected by all the people" in a state ``with lots of religious interests, lots of social and economic interests. I take that charge seriously."

In the upcoming legislative session, the governor and the legislative branch already squaring off over the size of tax cut Utahns should receive, with Huntsman at \$60 million and House Republicans calling for \$230 million, and over whether the state should bond for roads or pay cash.

Much of Huntsman's legislative activities took place in private in the past year, which is a style he's

likely to keep.

`` I come from a world in which you decide what you want to get done and put it out there on the table it doesn't need to be with a lot of ruffles and flourishes and you then build coalitions toward getting it done.

`` The results speak for themselves."

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