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Utah's governor faces OIA's board of directors

→ **FOR MORE THAN HOUR** Wednesday afternoon, Utah Gov. Gary Herbert fielded question after question about his state's headline-making brinksmanship with the federal government. Speaking at a closed-door meeting of the Outdoor Industry Association's (OIA) board of directors at the Marriott City Center Hotel, the governor attempted to allay their concerns about his commitment to the state's public lands, including the law he signed in March demanding the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service relinquish control of 30 million acres to the state or face a legal action.

"I found in talking to them [the OIA board] that there are some misunderstandings," Gov. Herbert explained in an exclusive interview with O.R.D. after the meeting. "There's some exaggeration and distortion out there in the marketplace that I think we were able to correct here today." He specifically cited H.B. 148, the law he signed requiring the transfer of federal lands — including Grand Staircase National Monument — to the state to maintain, sell or lease. "What H.B. 148 really does and what people say it does are not necessarily the same thing," he said. "We have people who believe we're already suing the federal government. That's not true." Herbert said he doesn't believe that a rift exists between his administration and the outdoor industry. "There's maybe some, 'I didn't understand that,' or 'I've got some questions here,' and we tried to resolve that today."

As he left the conference room, the governor encountered a scrum of reporters from local newspapers and television stations, indicating that the awareness, as well as the political significance, of the public lands issue is increasing as this year's Summer Market opens. Further driving the debate is the upcoming decision by Nielsen and the OIA about whether Outdoor Retailer remains in Salt Lake City beyond 2014 (see our story on page 26.)

"The importance of the local culture is probably a bigger factor for a show like OR than it is for a manufacturing or science conference," said Darrell Denny, senior vice president at Nielsen Expositions and a non-voting member of the OIA board. While Denny doesn't believe political differences alone are



Utah Gov. Gary Herbert

reason enough to move the show, he knows it matters to many OR attendees. "It's certainly a growing factor and building some degree of momentum now."

Following the meeting, both the OIA and Gov. Herbert promised more dialogue over the next few months to identify and resolve the disagreements could encourage Outdoor Retailer to go elsewhere "We are going to agree on most things, and we will probably disagree on some," Gov. Herbert predicted. "But it's important that we continue to have the dialogue so that no misunderstanding creeps in unintended." He also asked OIA to provide more details about additional needs like more exhibition space and hotel rooms. The governor assigned his chief of staff, Derek Miller, to coordinate the effort, and suggested it would involve representatives from the OIA, local governments and the state legislature, which drafted the public land laws viewed with suspicion by the outdoor industry.

A statement released by OIA's board of directors after the meeting included the expectation that the governor's staff would convene meetings within one month with the goal of providing specific recommendations by January's Winter Market. After noting that this was Gov. Herbert's first meeting with the OIA board, the statement continued, "It is disappointing that Utah — a place that draws outdoor businesses and enthusiasts alike — has not had a collaborative policy relationship with the outdoor industry. We would like to see that change."

It concluded with a warning that the OIA board shot across the bow of Gov. Herbert's administration "While not the deciding factor in a location decision, the political climate in a host state is one of many elements that will be considered."

As both the governor and the outdoor industry wait for the promised dialogue to begin, the clock for determining about OR's future location is running down. Previously, both Nielsen and OIA had mentioned that a decision would be made by this fall. "There's a tremendous amount of work that goes into moving a show the size of Outdoor Retailer," explained Nielsen's Darrell Denny. "What will likely happen is that the OIA board will convey a sense of preference and priority about locations no later than mid-October," he says. "It could be one city, or it could be two or three cities." While Gov. Herbert hopes that Utah is among the finalists, he said he understands the decision process that Nielsen and the OIA board must pursue. "These are business people. They understand the bottom line and the need to maximize profit," he said. "My suggestion is that they will be more profitable and more successful if they remain in Salt Lake City."

--JASON STEVENSON



Black Diamond Inc. CEO Peter Metcalf and others in the outdoor industry are mounting opposition against Utah's plans to take control of federal lands. Read more in our upcoming O.R.D., Day 2 feature story.