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Remarks by Director Squires — Opening of the USPTO Mountain West Community Engagement Office

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Remarks as delivered

John A. Squires, Under Secretary of Commerce for Intellectual Property and Director of the USPTO

Opening of the Mountain West Community Engagement Office

February 20, 2026

Thank you, Ken. And thank you very much, Dr. Dwyer and Dr. Jensen. We are delighted to be your new partners.

Ken has been with the USPTO for 13 years, serving the last 10 as a regional outreach officer for our Western Regional Outreach Office, based in San Jose, California.

He is extremely knowledgeable about the resources available at the USPTO and a natural choice to lead this community engagement office. Thank you, Ken, and congratulations, Ken.

I also want to acknowledge and thank my senior advisor, acting CFO, and your very own favorite U undergraduate son, Steve Hopkins, who joined me as a senior advisor for the Office of the Under Secretary and who has been a colleague and former client for over a decade here at Medici Ventures and Overstock.com.

We're fortunate to have them both at the USPTO, and visitors at this office will be likewise fortunate to have both their assistance to help understand and navigate the intellectual property protection landscape.

Speaking of landscape–and what a landscape–thank you all for being here today in beautiful, scenic Utah as we open the USPTO's new community engagement office, the Mountain West Community Engagement

Office, on the beautiful campus of the University of Utah. It's certainly a pleasure to be here today. And we welcome you to the USPTO, America's Innovation Agency.

The USPTO is the oldest federal agency in the United States. When our nation's Founders drafted the Constitution, they did something extraordinary. They placed intellectual property rights directly into the text of the nation's charter — Article I, Section 8, Clause 8. Before there was a Treasury Department. Before there was a Department of State. Before there were most of the institutions we now take for granted — there was a commitment to invention.

In 1790, President George Washington signed the first U.S. patent. Thomas Jefferson served as our first patent examiner.

From the birth of the Republic, innovation was not peripheral. It was central. It was, and still is, part of the American experiment itself.

For more than two centuries, our experiment has continued — through steam engines and steel, electricity and aviation, semiconductors and software, biotechnology and artificial intelligence.

And now, here in Utah, we extend that legacy both in a forward direction…And at the same time, "Back To The Future!"

Because the future of tomorrow's innovation ecosystem does not exist one-dimensionally, linearly only in far-away examination rooms in Alexandria. It lives and breathes and takes flight in the places where ideas are first imagined.

Where the flash of genius leaves its indelible mark.

The sweat of the brow of 99% of the perspiration in the research labs like those on this campus.

In engineering enclaves.

In the proverbial dorm rooms fueled by 4 o'clock-in-the-morning-type of courage.

In biomedical research centers.

In student startup accelerators.

Even in the elevator pitches.

Many people might be surprised that Utah's state motto is just a single word: Industry.

At the USPTO, and especially at the Department of Commerce, "Industry" is always top of mind.

The business of America is business.

And in America, it's synonymous with innovation, invention, and economic growth.

Intellectual property protection is the rarified and luminous connective tissue that binds it all together.

Intellectual property protection, of course, is the heart and soul of what we do at the USPTO.

And why we are now delighted to be right here, right now in the heart of Salt Lake City. The Mountain West Community Engagement Office is present and accounted for to the citizens of Utah to help their intellectual property dreams of today become the reality of tomorrow.

We know and admire that values are strong in Utah, and we value and admire our new neighbors. And our partnership is a new gateway for intellectual property ascension for the Mountain region.

In 2022, Congress had the foresight for and called upon the USPTO to establish what is referred in the statute as community outreach offices. However, to me, to breathe life and meaning into these offices and to achieve Congress's intent means something so much more. It's more than outreach offices; it's engagement; it's standing shoulder to shoulder to embrace the future, together.

That's why in taking office, and with the privilege of my deep experience with start-ups and emerging companies, we've reimagined our future footprint as one of immersive community engagement–an agile and responsive model to meet innovators where they are, in their context and in their experience, to engage head-on with the elusive shape-shifter that is inherently innovation, in whatever vestige it takes today.

Which begs the question: What, exactly, does innovation look like today, standing athwart 250 years of American ingenuity?

That, I can't tell you; it's way beyond my pay grade, beyond all of our pay grades in fact, and *don't* believe anyone for a second if they say they can.

Because as Jules Verne tells us in pursuing the depth of knowledge, in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas*, "Science has been built upon many mistakes, but they are mistakes which it is useful to make, because they lead little by little to the truth."

So, for every beautiful mistake that uniquely forms and reforms in symmetry and asymmetry of what innovation actually may appear to look like, for a fleeting second, I can you tell instead what a successful, modern, and robust innovation system looks like.

The system of tomorrow — that we are building today — rests on three ever-present and enduring pillars:

- Expansive eligibility to meet the onrush of new technology,
- Access that fosters participation, and
- Engagement that begins at the earliest stages of discovery.

Eligibility ensures that the next generation of transformative technologies — from AI to advanced manufacturing to life-saving medical diagnostics — has a clear and present pathway into the American economy.

Access ensures that every aspiring inventor — from rural communities to urban innovation hubs — understands that this system is open to them, is open for them, is there for them.

And we've got your back.

Engagement ensures that we are not distant arbiters of innovation, but active and alive partners with you in development.

Right here.

Right now.

New Hampshire was our first installment of this renewed expression of Community Engagement — a signal that America's Innovation Agency would move closer to the people it serves.

Montana expanded our vision into the northern Rockies — reinforcing that innovation is national, not coastal.

And today, Utah strengthens that arc across the Intermountain West.

Together, these offices are a living and growing our engagement network — an immersive build-out that recognizes the true geography and immediacy of American ingenuity.

Utah stands at the forefront of so many forefronts, of advanced manufacturing, of biomedical engineering, of computer science, just for starters.

The University of Utah has long demonstrated that world-class innovation does not depend on zip code — it thrives on imagination, resourcefulness, and opportunity.

In one word: Industry.

By placing a USPTO presence here, we are looking to provide the transmission mechanism for students and researchers — innovators of all walks and stripes — for their breakthrough technologies, their game changers, their societal advancements — for protecting them, for scaling them, for bringing them confidently and expeditiously to the marketplace, to the world stage, and to people's lives.

That is what this office represents and what our community engagement model is designed to foster.

Foster Education.

Foster Partnership.

Foster Access.

Foster Prosperity.

And the reasons for the University of Utah as a community node are compelling as the rationale is unassailable.

The University of Utah is an R1 institution with one of the strongest commercialization pipelines in the Mountain West.

It has significant federal research activity at over $781 million in Fiscal Year 2025 with an aggressive plan for growth.

What's more, the University provides industry partnerships spanning biotech, AI, advanced engineering, and energy, in addition to the S.J. Quinney Law School with an IP specialization.

Now, I understand that there is a saying here at the University, an unofficial motto… "Imagine, then Do."

This is what American ingenuity is all about. This is what helped the United States become the world's leader in science, engineering, and technology. This is the very spirit of advancement that should inspire everyone.

This saying definitely applies to Utahns and the innovation that has come from the state. If anything, Utah's native-born prove that great innovation is all around us, in every one of us.

Take, for example, in 1912, Lester Wire, a Salt Lake City police officer, invented the first electric traffic light. And while red means stop, green means go (and in New Jersey, where I come from, yellow means 'go faster'), his selfless concern for the safety of police officers and the public motivated him to create this lifesaving device — at the age of 24, with no engineering background.

Remarkable.

Other notable Utahns who changed the world include Frank Zamboni, who was born in Eureka, Utah. Of course, just about everyone knows his name and invention, but everyone might not know that the patent he received in 1953 for what we often call the "Zamboni" was referred to in his application as an "ice rink resurfacing machine."

Philo Farnsworth, born in Beaver, Utah, was granted a patent in 1930 for the first fully electronic television. Harvey Fletcher, born in Provo, Utah, developed the first electronic vacuum-tube hearing aid while at Western Electric in the 1930s.

Walter Frederick Morrison, born in Richfield, Utah, invented the "Pluto Platter" and was granted a patent in 1958. "Pluto Platter" never heard of it? Well, welcome to the value of Trademarks, something else we also do very well at America's Innovation Agency — because everyone knows Mr. Morrison's disc rebranded as the Frisbee.

Finally, in a towering tribute to where we stand today, Robert Jarvik and his team invented the artificial heart right here at the University of Utah in the early 1980s.

Your inventions and innovations have impacted the United States and the world. Whether it's medical devices, traffic safety, or recreational and sports equipment from the likes of those I just mentioned, or any of the thousands of patent classifications we have at the USPTO, America's Innovation Agency is here — right here now in fact — and accessible.

As you may be aware, with my agency, patents are just half the equation. America's Innovation Agency houses two powerhouse factories: America's Invention Agency for patents, and America's Branding Agency for trademarks.

Anywhere you look, you see the value of federally registered trademarks, and, in turn, that branding is an integral part of a business's success and state of being.

Think "Frisbee".

As proof of the vibrant business activity of the companies, entrepreneurs, and others in the area, the combined trademarks federally registered to the residents of the Intermountain West area have increased more than 40% over the three-year period between 2022 and 2025.

Forty percent.

So, we're here for entertainers, influencers, your student-athletes — your beloved Utes! — some of whom, of course, are on this very campus, as well as so many others for which name, image, and likeness can catapult their career. And it starts with them, and provides attributes of personal agency and control amidst uncertainty in this rapidly developing brave new branding world.

So, what can innovators, entrepreneurs, small businesses, and others expect? Our very best, our passionate partnership.

The Mountain West Community Engagement Office will work shoulder to shoulder here with intellectual property practitioners and services, startups, and job growth accelerators. We will collaborate with local STEM organizations on outreach and educational programming.

My commitment to you is that this office will create fresh, tailored, and community-based programs that provide education regarding the enduring benefits of innovation and entrepreneurship.

Ken, Steve, and our colleagues at the USPTO's Office of Public Engagement will also educate prospective inventors across the spectrum, including individual inventors, small businesses, veterans, low-income populations, students, and rural populations about all public and private resources available to potential patent applicants, including the patent pro bono program.

You'll take great advantage of the many and growing free resources made available as good partners and good neighbors do. Some are already on our website:

Free webinars such as Path to a Patent and events on using the Patent Public Search tool to search like an examiner; USPTO Hours on the latest topics, such as our recent blockbuster on NIL; And a one-, two-, three-step approach to filing a patent application *without an attorney*, and learn how to assess the strengths and weaknesses of your patent application.

There's also our wildly popular Trademark Basics Boot Camp.

Other free resources abound, including our Patent Pro Bono Program to connect eligible inventors and small businesses with free legal assistance.

Need pros? Our Inventors Assistance Center is staffed by former supervisory patent examiners and primary examiners who are available to answer questions and to help you make filing a patent application simple and efficient.

And support, support, support — our Trademark Assistance Center is the epicenter for all customers, ranging from first-time filers to legal professionals and experienced trademark applicants.

It's all here.

How great is that?

To end with the University of Utah saying that I mentioned earlier, "Imagine, then Do"… Yes, indeed.

And then like voting in Chicago, come see us early and often right here at your beautiful and local Mountain West Community Engagement Office for all things intellectual property.

On behalf of everyone at the USPTO, we couldn't be more excited to be here, and to be part of your IP journey from the very first step.

In America's Innovation Agency with our thousands of dedicated employees, in the words of Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, who himself has over 500 patents, "You have a friend, You have a supporter, and You have an admirer."

And now, you have a brand-new neighbor.

It is now my honor as Under Secretary of Commerce for Intellectual Property and 60th Director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office to officially sign our joint agreement with the University of Utah to open the Mountain West Community Engagement Office.

Welcome.

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