

Altabanking, Discussing Utah's Economy in 2021 with Natalie Gochnour

Stan Sorensen:

Welcome to Altabanking, a business podcast for everyone interested in elevating their financial future. I'm your host, Stan Sorensen, and together, we're going to hear interviews, information, and insights for making great financial decisions for your business. Today, it is my great pleasure to kick off this podcast series by talking with one of my favorite people to talk to, Natalie Gochnour. Natalie is the director of the Kem C Gardner Institute at the University of Utah and somebody that I had the pleasure of working with as well as a member of the Altabank Board of Directors. We're going to take just a second to look back at 2020, but really, we're going to talk more about what we think is to come in 2021. We're going to dive a little bit into the Utah economic report to the governor as well. So, Natalie, as always, it's great to see you.

Natalie Gochnour:

Good to see you, Stan. Thanks for having me.

Stan Sorensen:

And thank you very much for being here. The tendency is for people really to want to sort of talk about 2020 and go back and relive all of last year. I thought maybe instead of spending too much time doing that, we should really kind of start off with 2021. Is it fair to say that we're kind of starting to see a recovery, and if we are here in Utah, what are some of the signs?

Natalie Gochnour:

Yeah, well, we've been through a lot and that's why we have that temptation to look at 2020, but 2021 is here and there is a light and it's getting brighter and brighter. And that light is really that we're getting on top of this deadly virus. Case counts are stabilizing in the country, they're dramatically down in Utah. I tell people, "It's not an economic recession, it's been a public health recession." So as you get on top of public health, the recession will go away. And we're indeed seeing that. Consumer confidence is up, we have unemployment rate at about 3.1% in the state of Utah, so that's very positive. It's also low in neighboring states. And as we have people returning to work, people more confident, vaccinations in arms, we're very much moving towards recovery.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. And that's great to hear. So you mentioned employment, you actually mentioned unemployment, but I figured let's talk a little bit about employment. Our numbers really were never as bad as the national numbers. And I know from some of my reading and some of our previous discussions that construction was one of the big drivers of keeping employment pretty stable in Utah. Do we think that, that particular sector is going to continue to perform that way?

Natalie Gochnour:

I do. So let me just kind of break it down a little bit. You have the nation that had this incredible downturn and in Utah, the downturn was very significant at first, but then we popped back much more quickly. So now we're performing at a much better level than the nation. And you're right, Stan, it is construction that led us through. And this is the construction of the airport, large projects, the housing

shortage that has created a lot of home building in our state, lots of apartments, multifamily units that are construction. So it's natural to ask, "Will that construction continue?" And I think the answer is, yes. And I'll tell you why, it's because we continue to have a housing shortage, the pandemic didn't erase that. And when we say housing shortage, we're always forming new households and we're always building new units.

Natalie Gochnour:

So what's the deficit or difference? And we continue to believe that there's somewhere between 40 and 50,000 units short in this market. So in 2021, you're going to continue to see home building. But on top of that, we have the prison, we have things going on at the Point of the Mountain, we have a lot of talk of an inland port, we have a convention headquarters hotel, you look downtown and you'll see some high-rises under construction, some towers. So construction's going to continue to be a strong force for growth in the state.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. And that's great to hear. We are going to come back and talk a little bit about housing shortly because there's a lot there that we can talk about. But staying on employment for just a second, one of the major employment segments here in the state, of course, is our tourism, right? Tourism and entertainment. Of course, it took a dip last year. It kind of had to.

Natalie Gochnour:

Can I just say, it was more than the dip?

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah.

Natalie Gochnour:

It was a punch in the gut.

Stan Sorensen:

Okay. Yeah. Okay, we'll go with that.

Natalie Gochnour:

Okay.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. In fact, just as a side note, I got an email today from the general manager up at Snowbasin, which started off one year ago today because this is the anniversary of the day that they shut down, followed by Snowbird and Alta and everybody else. But what's it going to take for those industries to begin to really bounce back? And we're seeing a little bit now.

Natalie Gochnour:

Yeah. Well, Stan, I mentioned the punch in the gut because it's unbelievable what's happened in leisure and hospitality. The convention business just shut down. The airlines business, it's not even half of what it should be, and it's been going on for months. So it's really been torturous. And I was talking to a tourism

analyst the other day and he used the metaphor of a dam, and he said, "We've been backing all of this up behind a dam. And when the dam breaks open, it is going to open wide." And I think it's a helpful metaphor because as we begin ... Well, people have pent up a desire to travel. And a lot of people have a lot of excess savings, is the term we use in economics, excess savings. It is a term.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah.

Natalie Gochnour:

And it is the idea that there's people that have done well through the pandemic, but they haven't been spending. So now you start to feel safe to engage with the economy again, and you start traveling. So what's it going to take to get the tourism-hospitality business back on track? Confidence. And we're very close to reaching that, at least in Utah, and then I'm hopeful, in the nation. Now where we still have a lot of uncertainty is internationally, because we've got a lot of countries that aren't as fortunate as we are in terms of available vaccines.

Stan Sorensen:

Right. Yeah. So my final question on employment, and then we'll move on. Yeah, we do have folks out there who, unfortunately, they lost their jobs and in fact, some of the industries that they work in have really gone away, or they're not going to be able to reemploy those folks very quickly. So Governor Cox has talked about an initiative to kind of re-skill workers who need it. I was hoping maybe you could talk for just a minute about that, if there are sort of priority areas where we want to apply our efforts to re-skilling first, but just an overview of that.

Natalie Gochnour:

Stan, it is widely acknowledged that as you come to the end of this pandemic and enter this new chapter, that it is indeed a new chapter, a different economy. And in economic terms, what we mean is the structure of the economy has changed. Something's different. And you say, "Well, okay, what's different?" Well, commercial real estate may be different. The public health system will be different. Certainly, telework, tele-health, online education, remote sales, all this digitization will be different. Supply chains will likely be shorter. And we could keep talking about these structural changes, but what that starts to mean is, how does human capital or the skills that people have need to also adjust? So your question really leads me to think about, "What is it that we need to do to prevail in this new economy?" And indeed, there are many, many workers that either have to be retrained or up-skilled, is another term they'll use.

Natalie Gochnour:

And it's in all sorts of occupations. We are short on the tech field, always. We always need engineering, science, math, but we also need a lot of the trades. We mentioned already what a construction boom we have going on in the state and we need plumbers and electricians and welders and contractors, woodworkers. So what's happening is the state legislature and the federal government are pouring money in to help with this retraining, whether it's scholarships or new programs or incentives for teachers. And overall, I think it's incredibly positive for the Utah economy. The next economy will rise or fall based on how well we take care of our people.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Well, and I think one of the important things there is that we don't lose sight of the fact that we need the trades and we do need people to get either skilled up or re-skilled up in those trades. And I think it's very easy to sort of forget about that and begin to think about sort of the college and what are we going to do.

Natalie Gochnour:

Yeah. But I'll tell you something really troubling. You saw, you caught my interest when you said the trades, but if you look at enrollment in institutions of higher learning in Utah right now, they're up across the board, except in the case of Salt Lake Community College, and it's down dramatically, and it's down mostly for men. So you scratch your head and we're still new trying to understand that, but construction's booming so a lot of people are taking work that keeps them out of Salt Lake Community College. But we also know that this economy, this pandemic, has created winners and losers or people that have been harder hit. And some of the harder hit don't have the means, the coaching, whatever it is to be back in school. So this is a real problem point for Utah right now. We need to figure out ways to get people at the community college and being educated to work in this new economy.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. I like, and again, I'm not super well-versed in it, but I like some of the things that I had heard the governor talk about with respect to shorter programs, one-year programs or even nine month programs to get somebody ramped up and moving. Right? As opposed to having someone feel that they need to stay in school for two years, four years.

Natalie Gochnour:

Yeah, that's right.

Stan Sorensen:

[That way 00:10:17] they can begin to work.

Natalie Gochnour:

Yeah. That's right. Governor Cox has the one Utah roadmap. He outlines his priorities and he's very clear that he's interested in investing in post-secondary education and, particularly, in skills that are rapid, quick, job-related, and I think that's a big part of the future of higher ed.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. I think it's awesome, personally, we could go on and on about it, but we'll save that one for another-

Natalie Gochnour:

Okay. I'll do it.

Stan Sorensen:

... podcast. One of the areas where we mentioned we have a deficit, right, is the technology sector. And I wanted to spend a few minutes talking about that and I'll give the caveat as, you know I come out of that sector, for having worked a number of years in software. So it is always a particular interest to me to kind of follow along. Governor Cox has said that he would really like Utah to become known as the

startup state, which I think is an interesting ambition. We've already sort of touched on this, but to sort of maybe take it to another level of depth, what are we going to need to do to make sure that we have a homegrown workforce that can take those engineering jobs, those technical support jobs, et cetera?

Natalie Gochnour:

Yeah. Well, our state has a history in thinking about this. I was part of the Governor Leavitt administration. He wanted to double the number of engineers in our state in 10 years and they met that goal. And I would say that part of the upturn that we've seen in software and tech life sciences in our state has been because of that goal being achieved. You cannot succeed as a tech-

Natalie Gochnour:

... being achieved.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah.

Natalie Gochnour:

You cannot succeed as a tech economy without human talent.

Stan Sorensen:

Right.

Natalie Gochnour:

So, what does the state need to do? Well, it needs to continue to invest. And it starts very early, so we have to invest in the K-12, so public education, and then we've got to invest in our colleges and universities to get people trained for these skills. These companies won't come to Utah unless they see that they can hire talent. And so I think it's really an investment proposition.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, and that's really great to hear. One of the things we saw in Seattle, of course, is that at some point the homegrown skills kind of plateaued, and what we ended up with was a great deal of in-migration, to the point where there was almost a bit of an us and them that occurred over the course of 20 years. You're either from here, or you're not. You're either homegrown or you're not. How are we going to avoid something like that happening here in 20, 25 years.

Natalie Gochnour:

Yeah. Well, that is a tough question, and I'll tell you why. It's because it's already occurring, obviously, right?

Stan Sorensen:

Right.

Natalie Gochnour:

We're in our sixth year in Utah of over 20,000 more people moving in than moving out. It was over 25,000 last year. We know from the data that a large percentage of those are from California. No surprise there, it's the big elephant in the West. But it changes the nature of your state and it forces up home prices, and when you have in-migration and rapid population growth, you have more congestion. That's expensive. Growth isn't free. So, it is a tricky public policy question to, how do you work through this? And I mentioned when you asked me about tech, I said, "It's an investment proposition in people." This question is an investment proposition in infrastructure. You have to invest in water, roads transit. We have to invest in our canyons.

Natalie Gochnour:

And gratefully, the Utah legislature is doing this. They have the largest infrastructure bill in our state's history just passed this session. They put over 30% of their transportation investment in mass transit. That's surprising. That's a really big deal. They're double tracking FrontRunner commuter rail. They invested in Streetcar in Salt Lake City. And I may not have the number exactly right, but I'm going to say \$20 million in the canyons, give or take. But those are big moves, and that's a legislature that's recognizing the growth opportunity that we have in the state, but also the responsibility to do it wisely.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Yeah, and I would say to that too, for anybody who might be listening who is afraid that we will become the next Seattle or the next San Francisco, this is the thing that Utah has done very well that Seattle did not do well. And I speak of Seattle because of course I've got roots there.

Natalie Gochnour:

Yeah.

Stan Sorensen:

But that investment in mass transit and in improving infrastructure, and making sure that we think about where people are living versus where it is that they're working, so we don't just think about a North to South set of commuting lanes, but we think about East-West as well.

Natalie Gochnour:

Right.

Stan Sorensen:

These are things that I never saw in my time living there until it was too late.

Natalie Gochnour:

Yeah. In Utah, I'll give a really good example. In 2006... So, think of 2006. It was before the Great Recession. We were actually in a bubble. We didn't know it. But the economy was doing really well. This state increased taxes to pay for light rail. During an upturn, during a surplus, increased taxes in a conservative state. That doesn't match any kind of logic, but it was a state that plans. And they knew, we knew, that we needed to invest in light rail while we had the opportunity. And we did it in a bold way and then it paid dividends. If we didn't have that light rail system in the urban area that we have right now, it would be a long time till we'd get it again.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Oh yeah. Yeah. My other question about population growth and things is, one of the things that I noticed when I was looking at the economic report is that the lines between net migration and natural growth, those points almost touch. And I'm just curious, is that unusual in the nation? Is Utah in an unusual position or unique position in that regard, or are we just one of many that are experiencing that now?

Natalie Gochnour:

Well, just to put a little bit finer detail on it, if a population grows, it's because of births or people moving in, and then you have to take out deaths. So natural increase is births minus deaths, and then you have net migration, out and in, what's the net?

Stan Sorensen:

Right, right.

Natalie Gochnour:

So, your point is that they're about the same in Utah right now. And it varies a lot over time. When the economy is strong, we have more net in-migration, when we're not as relatively strong, our natural increase is higher. But they're about the same right now and it is a bit unusual. But there's 50 states, so I can find a lot of variants among the 50 states.

Stan Sorensen:

Sure, sure.

Natalie Gochnour:

A general rule of thumb, right now there's about nine states that are actually losing population, so they're in a different category altogether than us. That's New York, West Virginia, Illinois. Then there are states that have a far greater out-migration than we have, but still grow. California's had massive out-migration, so almost... Well, not almost, all of their increase is coming from natural increase because they're losing people through population. So, you get those far extremes, but in Utah, because of our relatively high fertility rate and then a strong economy, we're getting both and they're at about the same level. So, we're unique.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah.

Natalie Gochnour:

Yeah.

Stan Sorensen:

We talked about housing earlier and I said we'd come back to it. This is an area that we could spend a whole lot of time really talking about, and I don't want to get too into the weeds maybe, but there are some things that I've sort of noticed and that I do want to have a chance to talk about. We've talked about a housing shortage, but by the same token, construction values are up. And in fact, 10.7% as of Q3 2020. Our multifamily values are up as well, over 28.5%. So, really then of course, what that is

suggesting is that building is continuing to increase, which you did mention earlier. Knowing that it is increasing, why do we continue to say that we have a shortage?

Natalie Gochnour:

It's just not increasing enough, Stan.

Stan Sorensen:

Okay. Yeah. Right, yeah.

Natalie Gochnour:

It's a supply question. So, think of it this way. We've had in-migration, so that's pressure on new home building. We've had low interest rates. That's pressure on new home building. We have our own natural growth, which is higher than most states, so we have that pressure on home building. And then we have supply constraints. Lumber is very expensive right now. We have in some places, a shortage of land. In Salt Lake County, you can't find a lot of available land these days. That's why we're pushing into other places. You also have a shortage of labor at times. That might sound interesting during the recession, but our unemployment rate's at 3.1%. So, you have construction industry that's building as fast as they can, but the demand is so great that we're still... We're gaining a little ground, but we had such a shortage that had developed over time. So the answer is, we're still not building enough supply.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah.

Natalie Gochnour:

Yeah, surprisingly enough. And yet, look around at all that's under construction.

Stan Sorensen:

Well, exactly.

Natalie Gochnour:

Yeah.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. So if we talk about supply, housing supply, and we talk about building, are we starting to see more investment in... Well, let me actually change that just a little bit. So we are seeing investment, I know, in multifamily dwellings.

Natalie Gochnour:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Stan Sorensen:

Would you say that the majority of those that are going up are multifamily dwellings that are being sold? So, those units are being sold? Or are we really thinking about a renting population?

Natalie Gochnour:

We are definitely seeing more renters than we've seen in the past, and some of that, well, a lot of that's affordability. And some of it is preference. There is a generation of Utahans that aren't ready to settle down, and it's a large cohort, and so they'll continue to rent. So we had in 2019 a record year for multifamily. It was down a little bit in 2020, but like the second record year. And so, it's very visible to the average Utahan. If spend time in urban Utah and drive around, walk around, ride your bike around, you're going to see a lot of apartments under construction. And I would say that's very healthy for our market. We just completed a study at the Gardner Institute that showed that housing values around apartments actually go up faster than housing values not in close proximity. That was counterintuitive. And it's just a matter of meeting market demands and meeting the market where it is.

Stan Sorensen:

Okay.

Natalie Gochnour:

Yeah.

Stan Sorensen:

So I have to ask you, why did we see those housing values then around those apartment buildings... Why do they go up?

Natalie Gochnour:

Yeah. A lot of it, they're close to transit. When you have massive investments next door, you tend to invest more next to it. The property values rise. And so it's this phenomenon of a market that is reinvesting and being reinvigorated. And so, yeah, it was really interesting to see.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. I'll have to go out and get that off the website and have a look.

Natalie Gochnour:

You'll like it, yeah.

Stan Sorensen:

It's really very interesting. So really, my final question on housing... We had a break just a few minutes ago and we talked during the break a little bit about all cash offers, and people coming in taking on very little debt and offering above. Sometimes I think about housing, and housing shortages, in particular, as affordability versus availability. Right now, would you say that we're at that point where affordable housing is where the shortage is? Or do we still have a little bit of runway before we hit that point?

Natalie Gochnour:

Yeah, without question it is both availability and affordability. We have pressures in both. We have one of the most challenging housing markets in the country right now, and where it is most challenging is the combination of the two, available, affordable housing. And so, if you are a younger adult Utahan trying to enter the home ownership market for the first time, very challenging right now. Very, very challenging. And it's a real concern to our state legislature. Utah has always been a home-ownership

state. We've always had plenty of incentives for people to buy homes, to accumulate wealth in that way, and it's just proving to be very difficult.

Natalie Gochnour:

And your point is spot on, Stan. A home goes on the market at a listed price, and someone swoops in from out-of-state and offers more and pays cash. And what is the owner to do, but to take that? And so, when you repeat that over and over again, it's squeezing out Utahans. And so, I don't know exactly the public policy solution to this. This is very complicated. But it is a reality, and it goes back to something we talked about earlier. If you're a public decision-maker, if you're a parent, if you're a young adult, investing in your education is the best thing you-

Natalie Gochnour:

... if you are a young adult, investing in your education's the best thing you can do because by educating your workforce, you're going to make a workforce that is more able to pay for these expensive market conditions.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. One of the things, and this is where things sort of cross with a bit of our infrastructure conversation as well. I suspect that, and in fact we see a little bit of this, where more and more single family homes are going to be built further and further out of the urban settings and even out of some of the suburban settings. We'll push farther West, we'll push farther sort of Southwest or what have you. That then requires us to think even harder about the infrastructure investments that we make, doesn't it?

Natalie Gochnour:

Oh yeah. Yeah, it does. And in fact, if you wanted to pick a place where I think there's a lot of opportunity right now in real estate, Twilla County. Twilla County is close to the urban activity centers, has a lot of available land that's still relatively affordable, and there's a big freeway that's not at congestion levels to bring you back and forth. And so, yeah, we have a state that needs to very consciously think about, some people call it good growth, some people call it smart growth. I call it quality growth, but it's the idea of investing in walkable neighborhoods, investing in transit, investing in mixed use developments, smaller lot sizes, more housing options, accessory dwelling units, those sorts of things. And I know I keep talking about the legislature, but the session just ended a few weeks ago.

Stan Sorensen:

Well yeah, it's fresh on our minds.

Natalie Gochnour:

It was an incredible session. They did a lot of things. One of the things they did is they made it much easier for people all around the state to have accessory dwelling units at their home. These are like grandmother apartments and the like. The state's kind of weighing in and saying, "Local government, we want more housing choices in Utah." And it's because it's a imperative. We have to provide more housing units to deal with growth. The further we push people out, the more expensive and the more, I'll call it more air quality challenges we have. So there's a lot of reason why we should be thinking very carefully about where we grow.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Well, and as we said earlier, we sort of started at a step or two ahead. I don't think we want to go backwards, right? We certainly just want to keep pushing that forward. And to that point, the one Utah roadmap, governor Cox's roadmap, does talk about investment in infrastructure and we've talked about that quite a bit. There were two points in there though that I wanted to specifically ask about, and I think one comes right on the heels of what we were just talking about with respect to growth, pushing out of the urban centers. He talks about rural matters, and there are a lot of threads that go through that. How does everything we've been talking about, right? The housing, people pushing out further, et cetera. How is that going to impact some of those rural matters priorities that the governor has said he wants to pursue?

Natalie Gochnour:

Right. Well, there are people, and I've been among them, that have talked about two Utahs. We have an urban Utah that in the grand scheme of things, not withstanding the pandemic, but has thrived. Had a lot of opportunity, a lot of upward mobility, a lot of economic opportunity. And then we've had another side of Utah. It's not all of rural Utah, but a big portion of rural Utah that is stagnated, that's been in decline, that has a lot of indicators of distress. Nowhere is that more acute, that I'm aware of, than in Utah's coal country. This is Carbon and Emery County where Price, Castle Dale are. They're incredible communities, incredible people. They helped build this state, they provided the energy that built much of the state. But they have coal mines and they have two coal-fired power plants. And they're both, these coal fire power plants are in Emery County, and they're both slated for closure in the foreseeable future.

Natalie Gochnour:

So, that's an example of a rural setting that's actually pretty close. Price is what, 90 minutes from Silicon Slopes? It's not that far. So it's pretty close, has great, hardworking people. They have Utah State University Eastern there. So they have a university there. It's the old, what did they call it? College of Eastern Utah for people that think like that. It's the closest red rock to the urban area. The San Rafael Swell. Yeah, really beautiful red rock canyons and the like, San Rafael River. Ubiquitous broadband, meaning they have invested in broadband.

Natalie Gochnour:

And so anyway, so I'm just trying to say that's a place in Utah that is struggling and has a difficult outlook, except that all these advantages lead to something better. So back to governor Cox's roadmap, take a place like Price, open up state offices there, have telework arrangements there, invest in human capital so you can have tech jobs there because it'd be more affordable than being in Lehi. Can you have state employees work from there? Could you have state parks and recreation housed there? I mean, I'm just giving you examples of the types of conversations. And these are rippling all throughout the state. For us to have a governor who comes from Fairfield, Utah, who I won't know the whole bio but I think has his first degree from Snow College, to rise to the chief executive of our state shows you what can happen.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. It's kind of funny that there are some I know who kind of, I don't want to say criticized, but they poke some fun at him for continuing to talk about his small town roots and things like that. But I do

think particularly in this state, it's important for him to continue to reemphasize that, right? So that people know that he really is thinking about the entire state, right? All of us. And that-

Natalie Gochnour:

Well, and importantly though, rural Utah's part of the urban solution, because we are congested. We've got air quality challenges. It will very much help us if they'll take some of this growth. And if they're not growing, they're being subsidized. I'm just saying in the grand scheme of things, how public policy works. So, we want to have a state full of opportunity, and right now there are opportunities in rural Utah, if we can find them and focus on them and I'd tell any state leader that asked me about it to just prioritize. Pick places in rural Utah that have these natural advantages and go invest there, and Price is one of them. Richfield would be another, Brigham City another. There's regional centers that if we invest in them, they'll pay dividends to our state.

Stan Sorensen:

The other thing that I picked up on in the infrastructure portion of the roadmap, is the emphasis on public private partnerships, and I have to say that slowly or it's never going to come out correctly. What I'm wondering about there is, what are some areas that we might think of as low hanging fruit, right? Where might we start to see these public private partnerships? I'm a big fan of, by the way, where might we see them start to develop first?

Natalie Gochnour:

I wish I had a good answer to that, Stan because I'm going to say something here that I don't know how that exactly works, but you're hearing a lot of talk, and governor Cox talks about it, of a tram, a gondola I should say, in Little Cottonwood Canyon. This is intriguing, right? Because you got this canyon, that, I'm a native Salt Laker, I'm a big time skier and I just can't ski in little Cottonwood anymore. I can never make it up the canyon, it's too congested. And then if it's not congested, it's closed because of the avalanche danger. And I had the general manager of Snowbird say to me recently that canyon was not built for cars. It's one of the most high risk avalanche roads in the world.

Stan Sorensen:

I heard that just the other day, actually.

Natalie Gochnour:

Yeah, and yet it's just such an incredible jewel in our state. Both for back country skiing, for hiking, and certainly for downhill skiing and snowboarding. So, maybe things like a gondola or a place where a public private partnership might make sense. As I understand that, they would headquarter it near La Caille restaurant, and take people up, have a few stops, and if you stop at Snowbird and you stop at Alta, you service most of the needs there. Even in summertime, most of the trailheads are close to those resorts. And you'd still have the road, but you would have a toll there. So there's another opportunity for public private partnership. Anyway, I'm just saying that on this podcast to give listeners, viewers an idea of the possibilities. So now, start magnifying that for a lot of other opportunities in the state. The problems we face as a high growth state that's trying to preserve life quality, they are difficult problems, and they require innovation and policy entrepreneurship, that's the word I think our governor would use, and that's the kind of thing that we should be looking at.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. I think it has incredible promise. I liked seeing it on the roadmap and I sort of think about it kind of pie in the sky as well. There are so many different potential opportunities out there, it's going to be exciting to see how things develop over the next few years.

Natalie Gochnour:

Yeah. I think that there is a broad agreement that Utah has a very bright future.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah, definitely. Great. Well, what I want to do now is I want to sort of shift to something that we're putting into place now in our inaugural podcast. We're going to do this with all of our guests when we sort of jokingly, we're calling it the lightning round. None of them are trick questions, none of them are traps.

Natalie Gochnour:

Should I put on a seatbelt?

Stan Sorensen:

No, you don't even need to do that because we're not going to time it. But it's a little different than having the policy discussions. So I've got four questions and I'm going to ask them, take as much time to answer them as you want, or not. And yes, they're all benign. But the first is, what books are currently on your nightstand?

Natalie Gochnour:

I've been reading a lot about equity, diversity, and inclusion, probably like a lot of people. So, I've had some interesting reads on white privilege, white supremacy and the LDS church. So I've filled a little bit of my reading with trying to understand how to responsibly approach anti-racism behavior in our lives.

Stan Sorensen:

So I have to ask, it's going to sound like a pitch. Have you read *Uncomfortable Conversations With a Black Man* yet?

Natalie Gochnour:

I will tell you I have not, but I will tell you that I've had a lot of uncomfortable conversations. So, tell me more about that book.

Stan Sorensen:

So it's written by, boy and I hope he listens. It's written by a fellow named Emmanuel Acho. He is a former NFL football player who got very involved during his time in the-

Stan Sorensen:

...ballplayer who got very involved during his time in the NFL with trying to sort of talk to people about racism and lack of equity, et cetera, became an ESPN commentator and he started up on the side as a kind of a sort of a public outreach type of push, a short series of YouTube videos, where he sits down, one-on-one, like we are, and he talks with folks about what it's like to be black and what their experience is like being white and sort of how the two interact.

Stan Sorensen:

And so he's written a book about it. I highly recommend it.

Natalie Gochnour:

I've been telling people that start getting into this topic to beware, because it's a fire hydrant.

Stan Sorensen:

Oh, yeah.

Natalie Gochnour:

Yeah. Yeah. And, I mean, it comes fast and in high volume, and I'm grateful for that, but it's in my own sort of work life, it's gotten far beyond race and ethnicity, and ethnicity and beyond gender and beyond sexual preference.

Stan Sorensen:

Oh, yeah.

Natalie Gochnour:

And into all sorts of areas of where people don't feel a sense of belonging.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah.

Natalie Gochnour:

And so it's a really positive, productive, conversation, but it is not for the faint of heart.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Definitely not for the faint of heart. Yeah. And I tend to think uncomfortable as a bit of an understatement as well when it comes to these topics.

Stan Sorensen:

Okay. So the second question, and we're still going to talk about books, but what would you recommend to one of our listeners who just wants some escapist fare?

Natalie Gochnour:

Boy, I'm not a good one to ask that because I read primarily nonfiction.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah.

Natalie Gochnour:

That's just what an economist is going to do.

Stan Sorensen:

Right. Which sometimes does count, by the way.

Natalie Gochnour:

Yeah. That's true. Escapist fare. So I'll tell you something about me, Stan. I'm someone who reads a lot of, for lack of a better term, religious studies books. I really enjoy, and I think of it as much as anything as philosophy.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah.

Natalie Gochnour:

Trying to understand philosophy. So one of my favorite books is by O.C. Tanner and it's titled Christ's Ideals For Living.

Stan Sorensen:

Okay.

Natalie Gochnour:

Okay. Christ's Ideals For Living. Now, whether you're Christian or not, just think of it as a great philosopher.

Stan Sorensen:

Right.

Natalie Gochnour:

And that philosophers ideals for living, but O.C. Tanner was an incredible philosopher, businessman, philanthropist.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah.

Natalie Gochnour:

And he put all of his thinking about that into this book. And he quotes from all of the transcendental literature, whether it's Emerson, Whitman, Thoreau.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah,

Natalie Gochnour:

He brings all, Gandhi, he brings all of that into it. And then he's got some of the more classical. So that's, for me, that's fulfilling. I don't know if it's escapism, but it's fulfilling.

Stan Sorensen:

Okay. So our final two questions, and not about books, but we'll ask about just a couple of other things really quickly. This is a question that I ask everybody, just because I just find the answers to be very interesting. This past year when we spent a lot more time sort of sequestered in our homes, did you discover any binge worthy television that you would recommend to somebody?

Natalie Gochnour:

Okay, this is another unfair question for me, Stan. You know what I spent my time doing? Riding my bike and hiking peaks.

Stan Sorensen:

Perfect.

Natalie Gochnour:

I did not watch any television with the exception of news programs.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah.

Natalie Gochnour:

And the Utah Jazz.

Stan Sorensen:

The latter of which is great binge-worthy television.

Natalie Gochnour:

Could count.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah.

Natalie Gochnour:

Could count a little bit. I have The Mormon Murders on my list now, with Netflix, my kids tell me I need to watch that. And I probably, I love London and the mother country, so I probably would like The Crown, but I have not done any binge television.

Stan Sorensen:

Which I will say is actually refreshing to hear.

Natalie Gochnour:

Well, I hope you get a lot of guests that have been, but I'm just, I cook, I do a lot of cooking.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah.

Natalie Gochnour:

But I do not spend time watching television.

Stan Sorensen:

I have asked people that question and gotten six or seven shows on the list and then I go and I look them up and I see, oh, these are like 10 episode shows and people are yeah, anyway.

Natalie Gochnour:

A lot of time.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. A lot of time. So, yeah. Yeah. I love that you don't have any.

Natalie Gochnour:

Sorry I'm not more interesting, but keep going.

Stan Sorensen:

No, I think it's plenty interesting. I think it's great. But sort of along those lines, not the TV lines, right. But that you spend a lot of time hiking, riding your bike and all, did you pick up any new hobbies or activities?

Natalie Gochnour:

Well, I mentioned the hiking part, right?

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah.

Natalie Gochnour:

So I live in Murray. The pandemic occurs, and it's as springtime and the snow's melting, and can't travel, and you can only be with close people like my husband. So we started hiking peaks all around the Salt Lake Valley and then we'd hike them again and again. And so I would say by November of 2020, I've summited 30 peaks.

Stan Sorensen:

That's awesome.

Natalie Gochnour:

So that's different, right?

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah.

Natalie Gochnour:

I mean, well, just the volume of that.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah.

Natalie Gochnour:

And we can't wait to get out there again. It was that rewarding to us. And I don't want anyone to think like that we're mountaineer quality hikers. A lot of them were just summiting again, Wolverine in Brighton Bowl or Tuscarora.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah.

Natalie Gochnour:

Or Clayton Peak, Sunset, and doing them from the Alta side, doing them from the Snowbird side.

Stan Sorensen:

Right.

Natalie Gochnour:

Sorry, doing it from the Brighton side, or then doing three of them in the same day, all of these things in different mixes. But you get to see all the changing of weather. You get to see the people that run the mountain crest lines, see a lot of wildlife. Just incredibly memorable.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah.

Natalie Gochnour:

And they use this term in Utah that can have a cabin in the city and that's the summer, fall, that I just lived.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. I think that's wonderful.

Natalie Gochnour:

We're lucky.

Stan Sorensen:

Just wonderful.

Natalie Gochnour:

We're lucky.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah.

Natalie Gochnour:

We're lucky.

Stan Sorensen:

We're very lucky. Yeah. You talk to people that have had to sort of go into lockdown and in bigger cities and they, our experience is a complete opposite.

Natalie Gochnour:

Yeah. I don't know if you know the peak, the Pfeifferhorn. It's the one where the avalanche was this week.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah, yeah, just was, yeah.

Natalie Gochnour:

But Pfeifferhorn's this incredibly picturesque peak and I'm closer to 60 than I am to 50. So to Pfeifferhorn you have to kind of put a little effort into that as an older adult. But it's incredible.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah.

Natalie Gochnour:

So.

Stan Sorensen:

Outstanding. Any other parting thoughts or comments that you'd like to make and share with our listeners?

Natalie Gochnour:

Do you know the thing that I just feel is important for viewers to understand is that as hard as this pandemic's been, we're going to come out of it, in Utah, relatively stronger than most states. And now we've got a whole new stimulus coming to our state that quite frankly, some parts of it we don't need.

Stan Sorensen:

Right. Yeah.

Natalie Gochnour:

So it's harder to spend wisely. That's how I'm saying that. But our state will figure it out. And so when we spend it wisely, it's going to create more opportunities. Whether for the training, for the infrastructure, for public health. So we'll do good things with it. I don't want people to think that it'll go to waste.

Stan Sorensen:

Right, right.

Natalie Gochnour:

But it will create the dynamics for a really positive next few years in our state. So I would tell people that Utah's future is bright and that your challenge is to figure out how to harness the good things that are happening and create great opportunities for you and your family.

Stan Sorensen:

Natalie Gochnour, thank you very much for taking time with us today. As always, it's wonderful to talk to you. I always learn something and really appreciate your taking the time today.

Natalie Gochnour:

My pleasure.

Stan Sorensen:

For everyone else. I want to thank you for listening to Alta Banking, and until next time, make sure to subscribe to the show on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, Pandora, or Google Podcast. We'll talk to you next time.