The Jim Bridger Room at the Logan City Library was packed last Thursday evening with people who were interested in hearing what two local legislators had to say about disability. The “Meet Your Elected Officials” event on Jan. 17 was organized by the Northern Utah Coalition on Disability, of which the Center for Persons with Disabilities is a part. Republican Representatives Rhonda Menlove and Edward Redd participated in the forum. Menlove is the Vice Provost for Regional Campuses and Distance Education at Utah State University and has served in the legislature since 2005. She currently is the chair of the House social services appropriations committee. Redd practiced internal medicine in Logan for 16 years before being named deputy director and medical office with the Bear River Health Department. He also provides care for people with mental illness through Bear River Mental Health. This is his first term in office, and he serves on the social services appropriations committee and the health and human services committee.

As a new representative, Redd said he is still learning a lot, but as a physician, he has a unique perspective on what happens when people don’t get the services they need. “I do have some insight into the challenges you face and your families face,” he said. Redd would like to work towards programs where people with disabilities can be employed and not lose benefits. Too many people have to choose between remaining unemployed or losing benefits. “It’s really frustrating to watch them struggle with that,” he said. Redd also said he is interested in the area of preventive intervention. “I’ve worked with many people and have wondered what they would be like if they’d had early intervention,” he said. He said people need to talk to their representatives and tell them what issues are important to them. “It gives us a spine,” he said. “If we know you guys are passionate about something, we’re more likely to be able to support you in the legislature.” About 50 people attended Thursday’s event. Addressing the crowd of about 50 people, Menlove said many meetings to which she’s invited have low attendance. “This is one of the larger groups, Representative Redd. I’m impressed,” she said. Her three favorite bills of all time: scholarships to train more special ed teachers, supporting the employment bill and the autism bill—it was very challenging and difficult, and “it was nothing short of a miracle that it got approved from the feds,” she said. The committee reviewed requests for proposals for a two-year Medicaid waiver from agencies that supply services. “We’ll study it, we’ll research it to see what are the outcomes,”
she said. Menlove said the biggest challenge in the current session is the disability waiting list, which makes people with disabilities spend 90 days in a long-term health care facility before getting in-home services. People with more severe disabilities receive care first.

Moderator Jeff Sheen (left), from the Center for Persons with Disabilities, speaks with Rep. Rhonda Menlove (center) and Rep. Ed Redd (right). “That will be the biggest discussion,” she said. Menlove said the Affordable Health Care Act expanded Medicaid coverage so more people will access it. Last year, the legislature saved $40 million, so they will be able to cover the first year of the expansion. After that, the question is whether to roll out the full expansion and take the federal dollars. Disability issues are growing in our nation, Menlove said. “They are not going away. We’re all going to have to work together in the disability community,” she said. Cache County legislative representatives host Meet & Greets from 7:30-9 a.m. in the Cache County Building on Saturdays until the end of the session. OPTIONS for Independence will provide free transportation with 48 hours notice.