



## **DISTRICT 27 e-NEWSLETTER – February 24, 2014**

This week we had the privilege of hearing from both of our US Senators. First we heard from our senior senator, Senator Mike Crapo. He discussed United States fiscal policy, which is most of his committee work. He discussed how the US Senate has done nothing to reform entitlements or tax codes, in addition to doing nothing to slow our nation's debt growth. Like us, he is frustrated. There has been some discussion to consider cutting discretionary spending, which is essential since America finds itself with \$17 trillion in debt. He ended by commenting on Idaho House Joint Resolution 2, which was included in Speaker Bedke's section of the last week's newsletter. He is in full support of this constitutional amendment.

We also heard from Senator Jim Risch, who shared similar frustrations. We must find a way to turn our huge debt problem around. He commented that he fully supports compromises if progress can be made, but so far any compromise has been unattainable. Overall, he is optimistic about our nation because changes will soon be compulsory. Lastly, he agrees HJR 2 is very important because it will enhance state power and help keep our state sovereign.

Please put on your calendar two important dates: On March 1<sup>st</sup> at 2 PM will be the Mini-Cassia Lincoln Day Banquet. We will have every candidate for reelection of our statewide offices as well as our U.S. delegation. Also on March 1st at 6 PM is the Wilson Theater Gala. It is the main fundraiser, dinner and ball for our beautiful theater. We encourage you to attend these events and we'll see you there.

## **Speaker Scott Bedke**

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A lot of traction has been gained by those who continue to point out that Idaho's public education system ranks 50<sup>th</sup> in the nation. This claim has been painted as a source of embarrassment and an argument in favor of spending more money for education. But there is more to this story—and Idahoans need to know the rest of the story before they draw conclusions about our education system, our teachers, and the perennial request for "more funding." My thanks to Senator Steven Thayne for highlighting this information, which I am passing along to you.

Idaho's 50<sup>th</sup> place ranking is based solely on one criterion, that of per-pupil spending. In other words, Idaho spends less per pupil than any other state except Utah (which ranks 51<sup>st</sup> on a list that includes the District of Columbia). When other measurements are used, however, Idaho compares quite favorably with other states.

According to the *Report Card of American Education*:

1. Idaho ranks 29<sup>th</sup> overall and outperforms its neighboring states of Oregon, Utah, California, and Arizona.
2. Idaho receives a B- in Education Policy, with only six states receiving a higher grade.
3. Idaho ranks 28<sup>th</sup> in 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading proficiency.
4. Idaho ranks 19<sup>th</sup> in 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading proficiency.
5. In 8<sup>th</sup> grade math, only 32% of students are below basic, which ranks Idaho in 11<sup>th</sup> place.

Furthermore, research done by Idaho's Legislative Services Office has found that Idaho's rank on the ACT test is 16<sup>th</sup> nationwide.

Massachusetts is ranked number one in the nation according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The percent of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students in Massachusetts who rank proficient or higher in reading is only ten percentage points higher than Idaho's 8<sup>th</sup> grade students. Massachusetts spends \$113,920 per student by the end of 8<sup>th</sup> grade, while Idaho's spending for the same period totals \$68,200. Additionally, the District of Columbia earns the same overall letter grade Idaho does and they are only 1% above Idaho students in 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading proficiency, although they spend two and a half times as much per student. To see the full report containing these facts and more, click [here](#) and [here](#).

As Sen. Thayne concludes, "measuring and ranking Idaho by spending alone does not give a clear picture of the state of education in Idaho." Obviously we are getting a greater bang for our educational buck. Instead of focusing on our purported 50<sup>th</sup> place ranking (in spending), we should be pleased with the results we are achieving. There is, of course, always room for improvement. The status quo is not good enough, and our children deserve better. We will continue to strive for improvement across the board, but we should also be rightfully proud of our schools, teachers, administrators, and parents. We will continue to work with the Governor's Task force for Improving Education to ensure we are always spending our money in smarter and more efficient ways. There is a lot of good news to report about Idaho's education results.

## Representative Fred Wood

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This week the House Health and Welfare Committee heard from Department of Health and Welfare Director Dick Armstrong about options for indigent healthcare reform. As mentioned in a previous newsletter, Idaho's Health Insurance Exchange is continuing to improve, and thus it has been suggested that we use our state exchange to help provide medical coverage for low-income citizens who would usually qualify for Medicaid. Today there are 77,000 Idaho adults who would qualify for our Medicaid program, but shouldn't necessarily be enrolled in it since they do not have a significant disability. Medicaid assistance was originally meant for people with disabilities, children with special health needs, and low-income elderly. The original program of 68,000 has evolved to encompass an additional 179,000 individuals and includes low-income pregnant women, healthy children, and adults with children. Beyond Medicaid participants, in District 27, 30% of Cassia County and 30% of Minidoka County citizens are uninsured.

Federal government subsidies help reduce insurance premiums for patients by direct subsidies to the insurance carrier. At the end of the year personal taxes will be adjusted to reflect the actual income amount. Overall, this helps keep rates low for all Idahoans and does not apply unnecessary risks. This project results in more competitive pricing, expands service areas and encourages private carriers to participate. Our counties and state will no longer be paying for healthcare; rather, the private option

would pay for this and save money for our state general fund. This pilot project would make our healthcare and health insurance more efficient. For more about this, click [here](#).

## Senator Dean Cameron

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The Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee is in the first week of setting agency budgets. We approved several budgets this past week, including the Department of Finance, Public Utilities Commission, Office of Drug Policy, PERSI (state employee retirement), and Fish and Game. Then on Thursday we also set the Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State and State Board of Education budgets, the last of which also included health education programs. One of the highlights of the budget this week was within this division, when JFAC approved five additional medical seats in the WWAMI program. This is referred to as WWAMI for the coalition of five western states (Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, and Idaho) and helps Idahoans have access to medical school. We approved the funding for adding five more seats, which increases the current total to 30 doctor seats. The long-term goal is to increase it to a grand total of 40 seats, which would allow Idaho better opportunities for our students attending medical school. Providing additional medical education opportunities together with increased residency programs assists in addressing our physician shortage in Idaho and helps hold down medical costs. These additional seats cost \$115,000 for the first year.

Another important budget item to our area was a \$200,000 appropriation for sage grouse lek monitoring. It is anticipated that the Office of Species Conservation together with Idaho Fish and Game will monitor up to 1000 leks (courtship areas) in order to support the Governor's Sage Grouse Conservation alternative and hopefully prevent sage grouse from being listed as an endangered species.

It is always nice when people from home come to visit the State Capitol. It is a welcome sight to see a "friendly face." This week we were blessed with a number of visitors. I had the honor of spending an early morning breakfast with a dozen Cassia and Minidoka County young people participating in the "4-H Know Your Government" program. I am always impressed with the caliber of young people who participate in this program.

## With Appreciation

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Thank you all for the opportunity to serve our legislative district and state. It is truly a privilege that we greatly appreciate and do not take for granted. Please feel free to share your thoughts, ideas, or suggestions by emailing us or calling our offices. Often the best ideas come from constituents, like you. Please feel free to share this newsletter with others. If they would like to be added to our mailing list please send us an email.

Thank you,



Scott Bedke  
District 27  
Idaho State Legislature



Fred Wood



Dean Cameron