



DISTRICT 27 e-NEWSLETTER – February 3, 2014

This week was fast-paced and full of surprises, starting with Superintendent Luna's announcement to not seek re-election. Mid-week we received notification that the Idaho Education Network (IEN) contractor, Education Networks of America, had not been paid by our Federal FCC partners, which threatens their ability to continue to provide services to our schools and kids. Unfortunately, this potentially shorts the state General Fund by \$14 million between FY 2014-2015. Thursday, the Director of the Department of Water Resources announced potential curtailment of water users junior to 1974. On Friday, we had to release an audit with serious financial concerns for a few of our agencies. To say this has been a stressful week for us is an understatement.

Speaker Scott Bedke

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Earlier last week I attended the press conference held by Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Luna to announce his decision not to run for reelection. I congratulate Superintendent Luna for the good work he has done during his tenure, and I wish him well in the future. For a full story about Luna, click [here](#).

In a presentation last week at the Andrus Center for Public Policy at Boise State University, I proposed partial reductions to the grocery tax credit in an effort to free funds that would allow us to reduce the state income tax rate for all Idahoans. The idea started a conversation that continues to develop. While I never proposed cutting the tax credit for lower income families, others, including former state economist Mike Ferguson, came up with different conclusions about the possible effect of this idea on the economy and on individual Idahoans. I am not moving forward with my original idea, but I welcome further proposals to arrive at the goal of lowering the state income tax rate, since I believe this will attract businesses and will stimulate great economic development in Idaho. To read more about that proposal, click [here](#).

Superintendent Luna presented his proposed budget to the Joint Finance- Appropriations Committee last week. His proposal includes a doubling of the amount of discretionary funds given to school districts to pay for such things as health insurance and utilities. Luna's original recommendation was a \$16.5

million increase, compared to \$35 million increase in the current proposal. The revised budget provides more funding for salaries, professional development, and other areas consistent with the recommendations from the Governor's Task Force on Education. To read more about this, click [here](#).

Representative Fred Wood

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This week we received an update from Optum Idaho, a company contracted with the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare to provide outpatient services for behavioral health. Optum is a national company whose goal is to "provide solutions that address the physical, mental and financial needs of organizations and individuals." This company helps healthcare providers with their services to patients. During this hearing we heard from Department of Health and Welfare Director Dick Armstrong, Senior Vice President of Optum Specialty Networks Craig Herman and the Executive Director of Optum Idaho Becky Divittorio.

The presentation highlighted:

- First issue is call center volume: there has been an issue with call center employees answering Idaho health providers' phone calls in a timely manner. Optum assured the committee that this has been taken care of; over the last few weeks there has been a significant decrease in the wait time. It's been about 2 ½ minutes for the last week, even as low as 2 seconds for the last two days.
- The second issue has been resolving complaints in a timely manner. The employees from Optum have assured us that 96.5% of complaints have been answered and resolved within 10 days, which both meets and exceeds their contractual obligations.
- Lastly, 90% of claims have been paid within 10 days, both meeting and exceeding contractual requirements.

Optum Idaho is committed to providing individuals the best service they can for behavioral outpatient health. In order to do that, they have increased their telepsychiatry capabilities to psychiatric nurses. Additionally, there is a peer support system to facilitate a continued recovery. The crisis line also is accessible to Medicaid customers. There are over 3, 100 providers currently enrolled in 474 locations in Idaho. Optum helps with mental health and substance abuse issues. This allows patients to recover and have much improved lives. To read more about the company, click [here](#).

Senator Dean Cameron

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The Joint Finance- Appropriations Committee heard from natural resource agencies this week. On Friday we appropriated \$15 million to the Department of Water Resources for funding for various water

projects as recommended by the Governor. After the announcement on Thursday about potential water curtailment, this made the decision even more critical, click [here](#) for the Idaho Statesman story on the curtailment order and water shortage. The curtailment will shut off water users whose priority date is junior to 1974, unless additional snow and rain is forthcoming. The economic impacts of the curtailment will be difficult. About six years ago when the economy was in a better position, \$20 million was appropriated for aquifer studies and projects statewide, including funds to purchase Pristine Springs; unfortunately \$12 million had to be pulled back in 2010 as the economy declined. The \$15 million we appropriated Friday will help restore some of that. By appropriating the money, we allow the Water Board to begin working on time sensitive projects throughout the state.

With the tough news about the IEN in addition to the water problems, I want to assure you we are committed to funding education, protecting our citizens, and continuing to be fiscally responsible.

Constituent Question:

There is proposed legislation to create three behavioral health crisis centers in Idaho, one in southeast Idaho, one in southwest Idaho, and one in north Idaho. These crisis centers would be places where patients with acute symptoms of mental illness or substance abuse could be taken, rather than jail or emergency departments. This is a pilot program in Idaho. Montana and other states have adopted similar programs that have been successful. Your comments and questions would be appreciated.

With Appreciation

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
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Fred Wood



Dean Cameron