



## **DISTRICT 27 e-NEWSLETTER – March 21, 2014**

The 62<sup>nd</sup> Legislative Session adjourned Sine Die just before 7 pm on March 20. This has been a fast-paced hard-working session but not as contentious as we had anticipated. It was an intensely focused session largely because leadership including Speaker Bedke set a goal that we would all be finished by March 21. That focus helped everyone look past our differences and find compromises, and many good things were accomplished.

## **Highlights of the Session**

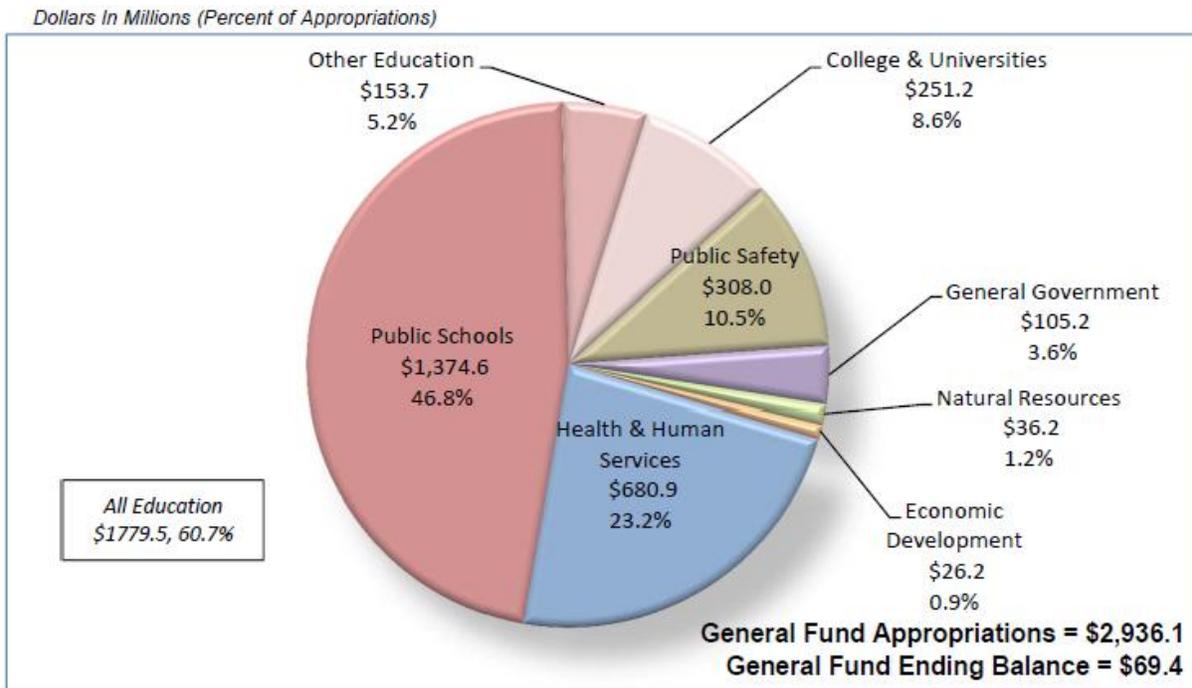
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This session we addressed a number of issues that are important to Idaho. The media often reports the negative, but we would like to focus on the good that was accomplished.

- Other sections of our newsletter have discussed the education budget. The Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee was able to appropriate an extra \$ 66.2 million, which is the highest percentage increase since 2007 and the largest budget since 2008. This improves our whole education system while helping Idaho retain and attract some great teachers. A number of the Governor’s Task Force recommendations were implemented, and we will continue to work on the remaining recommendations in the future. We were able to allocate more money because an improving economy has produced higher revenue to the state.
- Public schools received \$74,598,400. Highlights in that budget include:
  - A slight increase in the allocation of teacher pay along with administrative and classified staff
  - \$35 million additional in discretionary funds:
  - \$12 million for teacher professional development
  - \$14 million in technology including \$3 million in technology grants and \$1 million in technology certification training
  - Lastly, we applied \$5 million for curriculum and supplies. We heard the concerns of the education community and responded as best we could
- Colleges and universities received \$251.2 million or a 6.2% increase. Ag Research and Extension received \$26.5 million or an 8.3% increase. Lastly, professional technical

education (PTE) was allocated \$53 million or an 8.4% increase. PTE is of course allocated to our public schools, community colleges, and universities. This is a long-term investment in our economy.

Professional technical education, 4-H programs, higher education and community colleges also had significant improvements. Ag education programs statewide have seen a 20% enrollment growth the last five years but also experienced 36% teacher turnover rate in the last two years along with increasing lab and shop costs. This year the Legislature made a significant investment in the future of agricultural education by funding a full-time state FFA coordinator and increasing the amount of state funds that each ag education classroom will receive from \$10,260 to \$15,000.



- Water is one of the most difficult and complex issues that we have dealt with this session, as we've discussed in other sections. The Rangen water call has grave consequences for farmers and could threaten Idaho's economic well-being. Through many meetings and countless hours, we have been able to lay the groundwork for a long-term resolution.

This was perhaps the best year ever for money allocated for water. Perhaps the additional funding is a result of the early reports of the water shortages or maybe the Rangen curtailment order, which by some estimates would pose the specter of losing 1300 jobs and \$300 million in lost sales. Regardless of the motivation, it required great

leadership and a lot of work. Thankfully, we were able to provide three major funding allocations:

- \$15 million appropriated for water projects through the state, with a significant portion in the Eastern Snake River Plain
- Realignment of tobacco tax dollars to allocate up to \$5 million a year toward water projects
- Transfer of the “Aqualife” fish hatchery from the Department of Parks to the Water Resource Board, although only \$250,000 was needed, it sets the stage for a \$2.7 million deal
- Third, the Justice Reinvestment Act is a big accomplishment. This Act is the first step in improving the entire judiciary system and is expected to save us \$288 million by preventing the need for more prisons which will then free up more money for other budget.
- Senate Bill 1224 is about Behavioral Health transformation. The goals are as follows:
  - Follow industry best practices by integrating the mental health and substance abuse systems into a single behavioral health delivery structure
  - Allow for local control and responsibility over segments of the system that would otherwise remain state responsibilities
  - Align the statute with current practice
  - Prepare the behavioral health system for what we all hope are positive and necessary changes to the health care system in Idaho

This legislation has Governor Otter’s support. There would be a Community Resource Development Specialist in each region whose position is specifically designed to do the work envisioned in this legislation for the Regional Behavioral Health Board to complete. This legislation does not require new appropriation of personnel. It reduces state government by providing the opportunity for communities to more efficiently and effectively organize.

- Senate Bill 1352- Behavioral Health Crisis Centers. As discussed in previous newsletters, this is an important issue that will benefit both our correctional and health and welfare systems. Our citizens in behavioral health crises should not be incarcerated or treated in emergency departments; rather, it would be more appropriate and beneficial if they could be treated and stabilized in a crisis center.

Each crisis center would be governed by a board of at least five members, and the Department Health and Welfare will audit performance and function. There would then be an evaluation of the effectiveness and cost efficacy of each crisis center and it would later be reported to the Department of Health and Welfare and the Legislature. This bill is very important because it improves the lives of all Idahoans by having a more efficient way that will also prevent further misuse of preexisting programs.

- Senate Bill 1329 is another important piece of legislation dealing with time sensitive emergencies. The state Health Quality Planning Commission, hospitals, health care providers, among others have worked for months to create procedure improvements for those dealing with trauma, stroke and heart attack. A comprehensive system will save lives and integrate existing resources.

## With Appreciation

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Thank you 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. We look forward to seeing you this summer and around the Mini-Cassia area as we return.

Thank you,



Scott Bedke  
District 27  
Idaho State Legislature



Fred Wood



Dean Cameron