

Idaho Legislative Update – February

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The Idaho Legislature just finished its fourth week of the 2013 session, and despite the customary slow start that consists of committee budget hearings and rule making, things have started to pick up. As I mentioned in my last report, an excellent resource for tracking bills, agendas, legislator information, and much more can be found on the Idaho Legislature's website.

Budget Hearings: The Joint Finance and Appropriations Committee (JFAC) spent the first four weeks of the legislative session hearing budget request presentations from state agencies and departments. As is custom, JFAC first heard Governor Otter's budget recommendation that was delivered by Jani Revier, the newly appointed and capable Administrator of the Governor's Office of the Division of Financial Management. A copy of the Governor's budget recommendation presentation can be found [here](#).

Rule Making: The first few weeks of every Idaho legislative session consists of relevant committees holding public hearings on administrative rules that have the force and effect of law and as such are subject to a comprehensive process that includes review and approval by the Idaho Legislature in order to become final and enforceable. Best defined, a rule means the whole or part of an agency statement of general applicability that interprets or prescribes law or policy or the procedure or practice requirements of an agency. Despite the low level of attention the Rule-making process receives, the effects can be real, and Idaho is one of only three states in the nation that provides the legislature with the authority to amend, modify, or reject rules.

Dominant Issues Facing the Legislature: Two issues I predicted that would dominate 2013 were brought to fruition in the form of proposed legislation earlier this week. Here is a quick run-down:

- **Health Insurance Exchange:** In what is shaping up to be the most attention-getting issue facing the Idaho Legislature in 2013, the Senate Commerce and Human Resources Committee had a print hearing on Tuesday and voted to introduce legislation supported by Governor Otter and pitched by Governor Otter's Chief of Staff David Hensley that would create Idaho's own online marketplace for individuals and small businesses to shop for health insurance and dental plans. The committee has not set a date yet to give the proposal an official hearing, but it will most likely take place sooner rather than later, and will likely be better received in the Senate than in the more conservative House.
- **Education Reform:** Despite Governor Otter's declaration that he is

not looking for major school improvement measures this year, both the House and Senate Education Committees are advancing with education reform policies. Earlier this week, Committee members heard and voted mostly along party lines to introduce legislation that would reinstate many of the provisions from the voter rejected Students Come First Laws. On Monday, the Senate Education Committee took up four bills that are being described as toned-down parts of Students Come First, and on Tuesday, the House Education Committee heard three legislative proposals involving teacher employment and teacher union negotiations. All seven bills are being proposed and lobbied for by the Idaho School Boards Association.

Additional issues that could surface this session, and those that would be sure to make headlines, include the repeal of the personal property tax, liquor privatization, and eminent domain. However, due to the fact that almost one-third of the Idaho legislature consists of freshman, the unpredictability factor still remains.

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