

Idaho Legislative Update - April 2014

Insight — April 2014

The 2014 Idaho Legislature officially adjourned on Thursday night, March 20, a day earlier than originally forecasted. This year's session, at 74 days, was the shortest since 2004. Economic development legislation and public education funding topped the legislature's priority list, but a few higher profile issues, including topics such as guns on campus and protests to expand the state's anti-discrimination laws to add the words "sexual orientation" and "gender identity," dominated the media coverage. Below is a recap of a few high profile issues that the Legislature addressed this year:

- **Restoring Public Education Funding:** The Legislature approved an increase of 5.1 percent, nearly doubling the Governor's proposed 2.9 percent increase, resulting in a \$66 million boost in the public education budget for the next fiscal year. Included in this budget is \$35 million to help restore operations, \$27.3 million more for teacher pay, \$8 million for classroom technology, and \$4 million for books and curriculum materials. These cash infusions were an attempt to jump-start a series of reforms recommended by a state task force that released their findings prior to the 2014 Idaho legislative session.
- **Business Tax Incentive Legislation:** A bill that was promoted by Idaho Commerce Director Jeff Sayer, and supported by many in the Idaho business community, passed the Legislature this year. The bill, commonly known as the Idaho Tax Reimbursement Incentive Act, would allow the State to consider rebating up to 30 percent of a company's corporate income tax, sales tax, and payroll tax, and would apply to both current and new companies to Idaho. The duration of the deal, up to 15 years, would also be negotiated, and companies in urban areas would have to create 50 jobs, while companies in rural areas would only have to create at least 20 new jobs.
- **Guns on Campus Legislation:** After receiving a great deal of attention in the media and countless hours of committee hearings, the Idaho Legislature approved a bill that would allow concealed firearms on Idaho's public college campuses under certain circumstances. The bill would only allow retired law enforcement officers or people who have Idaho's new enhanced concealed carry permit to have concealed weapons on campuses. The legislation also includes exemptions that don't allow for concealed weapons in dormitories or in large entertainment venues with attendances of 1,000 people or more. The bill was sponsored by State Senator Curtis McKenzie, a Republican from Nampa, and was signed into

law by the Governor early last month.

- **Pollution Discharge Permit Bill:** A bill that would authorize the State of Idaho to assume the function of permitting and enforcing NPDES (National Pollution Discharge Elimination System) programs received approval from the Idaho Legislature in the form of House Bill 406, and was swiftly signed into law by the Governor. Idaho is currently just one of four states without this program, and it has been studying the feasibility of operating it for over 15 years. The Idaho Association of Commerce and Industry was the primary driver of the legislation, and it received far-reaching support, which was reflected in the bill receiving a unanimous vote in both the Idaho House and Senate.
- **Dairy Spying Legislation:** One of the more controversial bills this year that garnered both local and national attention, and one that was a surprise to many, was the so-called "ag gag" bill that was brought forward by Idaho's dairy industry. The legislation threatens people who secretly film animal abuse at Idaho's agricultural facilities with jail and fines, and was in response to videos released by a California-based vegetarian and animal rights group showing workers at an Idaho dairy abusing animals in 2012. The bill passed both houses of the Idaho Legislature, and was quickly signed into law by the Governor.
- **Religious Liberty Proposals:** A bill which outlined a plan to shield religious people from the threat of having their professional licenses revoked for refusing service or employment to those they conclude violate their religious beliefs was pulled from the House and is dead for the year. House Bill 427 was in response to a New Mexico case in which a wedding photographer was penalized for refusing to photograph a same-sex wedding. The legislative proposal received a great deal of attention in the press and at the Capitol, as it drew more than 500 people to the Capitol to testify in opposition to the bill. There is a good likelihood that this bill could resurface in 2015.
- **Legislative Oversight Authority:** Idaho is just one of a few states in which the legislature has the power to review the rules and regulations promulgated by government agencies and reject any that are unnecessary or contrary to legislative intent. To codify this oversight authority, the Legislature has proposed an amendment to the Idaho Constitution that will be voted on at the November elections.
- **Justice Reinvestment Program:** The Idaho Legislature voted unanimously this session in favor of Senate Bill 1357, a bill which aims to reduce Idaho's high recidivism rate by investing in reforms to the State's probation and parole system and community treatment programs, while moving to prioritize prison space for more violent offenders. The legislation was sponsored by Senate Judiciary Chair Patti Anne Lodge and House Judiciary Chairman Rich Wills, and was touted by the Governor as he signed the bill into law as a good plan aimed at heading off the need for a costly new state prison.

There are many more issues that the Legislature addressed this session,

from additional funding for water projects to the creation of a wolf control board, but far too many to write about each one in this brief report. An excellent resource for tracking bills, agendas, legislator information, and much more, can be found on the Idaho Legislature's website at www.legislature.idaho.gov.

If there is an issue that you have an interest in that I didn't include in my monthly report, please let me know and I will be happy to respond to your questions or comments.

Jonathan

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