



CAPITOL REVIEW

A WEEKLY LEGISLATIVE REPORT

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A Weekly Legislative Report

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BALLOT INITIATIVES

Legislation that seeks to increase voter involvement throughout the state in the voter initiative process passed out of the Senate State Affairs Committee after two days of testimony. S1110 would raise the bar to qualify a **voter initiative** for the ballot by **requiring the signatures of 6% of the voters in all the 35 legislative districts**. The current standard for an initiative or referendum to make the ballot is the signatures from 6% of the voters in 18 of Idaho's 35 legislative districts.

The Senate State Affairs Committee voted 6-3 to send the bill to the full Senate. The vote came after the committee heard over four hours of testimony in two separate hearings. The need for S1110 and a fix of the process stems from the fact that four counties in Idaho (Ada, Canyon, Bonneville and Kootenai) can meet the current standard of signature requirements. Though 18 legislative districts may sound like a justifiable amount, those 18 districts can be targeted within the population centers and, in essence, game the system. Another key point is that, as we reach the eve of another redistricting process that will shift more district representation towards urban centers and away from our rural communities, there is the obvious effect of depriving rural counties and their legislative districts. An increase in population centers necessitates **greater involvement and participation by Idaho residents in the ballot initiative process**.

CIVIL LIABILITY SUNSET

During the extraordinary session last August, the Idaho Legislature passed **civil liability reform**. The law provides limited immunity for businesses, churches, schools, and universities who are reopening during the coronavirus pandemic. The legislation helped ensure that entities can continue to move forward during reopening phases in Idaho. The language specifically addressed **immunity for a business, church, school, or university from civil liability for damages or an injury that is a result of exposure to coronavirus**. It also specified that

immunity will not apply to acts or omissions that constitute an "intentional tort or willful or reckless misconduct" as defined currently by Idaho Code. The law provides a level of certainty that the steps taken to prevent the transmission of coronavirus are reasonable without the continual need to worry about lawsuits. The final outcome removed any Idaho public health district, the federal government or any of its agencies, and the state of Idaho or any of its agencies except colleges, universities and other institutions of higher education.

The law took effect upon Governor Little's signature and **will sunset on July 1, 2021**. The law did not affect worker's compensation and related laws of the Idaho Industrial Commission. The legislation was supported by the Idaho Liability Reform Coalition, Food Producers of Idaho, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation, the Chambers of Commerce and the Idaho Association of Commerce & Industry.

H149 will **extend the sunset provision of the original legislation to July 1, 2022**. The House Judiciary and Rules Committee held a number of hearings regarding the legislation and ultimately decided that the legislation passed during the extraordinary session should continue to remain in force and effect until 2022.

PROPERTY TAXES

S1108 would change the formula for growth of property tax budgets and **provide relief for property owners from increasing property tax**. There has been a common, underlying issue that has been presented to the legislature over the past few sessions and that has been uncontrollable growth in property taxes, especially in high growth areas. S1108 would limit local government budgets to recognizing **50% of new construction in their property tax budgets each year and 75% of annexation, rather than 100% of both**, as under current law. Other tax reduction bills have been introduced to deal with the grocery tax, income tax and sales tax.

DEAN'S ADVISORY BOARD

The University of Idaho College of Agricultural and Life Sciences has a Dean's Advisory Board that is **represented by stakeholders** from across the state. Recently, that board received some new appointments: **Dave Bjorneberg**, Research Lead, USDA-ARS Northwest Irrigation and Soil Research Laboratory; **Travis Blacker**, Director of Industry Relations, Idaho Potato Commission; **Casey Chumrau**, Executive Director, Idaho Wheat Commission; **Theresa Golis**, Idaho Family & Consumer Sciences Program Quality Manager, State Division of PTE; **Lloyd Knight**, representing Director Celia Gould, ISDA; **Heidi Martin**, Vice President of Health & Wellness, Dairy West; **Zak Miller**, CEO, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation; and **Doug Robison**, Idaho President, Northwest Farm Credit Services. The board meets at least twice a year to review programs and activities of CALS and to provide leadership and direction to the Dean for the mission and future of CALS.

IDAHO HAY AND FORAGE CONFERENCE

The **Idaho Hay and Forage Association** held its annual conference this past Thursday, February 18. Over 50 attendees listened to presentations through the half day conference. Those presentations updated participants on the current outlook of agriculture in Idaho and the status of western hay and forage markets. Participants were also able to earn two Pesticide Applicator credits by listening to presentations provided by University of Idaho and USDA personnel.

NEW LEGISLATORS

This week we wanted to continue the trend and introduce several more **freshmen legislators**.

Sen. Ali Rabe **District 17 (Ada County)**



Born in Boise and raised in Middleton; graduate of The College of Idaho, B.A. in political economics, summa cum laude; graduate of William & Mary Law School, J.D., cum laude; member of the Idaho State Bar; executive director of Jesse Tree, a Treasure Valley nonprofit dedicated to preventing eviction and homelessness; board of trustees member at The College of Idaho; former staff attorney for Bay Area communities addressing homelessness; served as asylum and refugee officer for the Department of Homeland Security, covering details on the U.S.-Mexico border, Turkey, El Salvador, and in multiple U.S. locations; worked for international nonprofit

organizations in Cambodia and Sierra Leone on protecting communities' agricultural land rights; 2012 Boren Fellow; avid runner, gardener, and reader, and loving dog owner.

Rep. Bruce Skaug **District 12 (Canyon County)**



Born in Pocatello, raised in Jerome, and resident of Nampa since 1992; graduate of CSI and the University of Idaho College of Law (1988); civil practice attorney, 1992-present; former Ada County deputy prosecutor; former Nampa city councilman, 2014-2020; served on boards of multiple nonprofit organizations; avid historian and ATV rider; spouse: Debbie, since 1986; six adult children; four grandchildren.

Rep. Greg Ferch **District 21 (Ada County)**



Graduate of Kenmare High School, North Dakota (1984); B.S. in human biology from the University of North Dakota (1989); doctor of chiropractic from Northwestern College of Chiropractic (1993); Boise chiropractor since 1994; U.S. Army medic 1983-1994; Desert Storm veteran; past Idaho Association of Chiropractic Physicians board member; Chiropractor of the Year (2015); former Charleston Place Home Owners Association president (three years); Idaho Apartment Association's Independent Rental Operator of the Year (2018); lifetime NRA member; spouse: Angie.

Rep. Dustin Manwaring **District 29 (Bannock County)**



Born in Pocatello and raised in Blackfoot; graduate of Blackfoot High School, University of Utah, and Drake University Law School; Idaho State Bar; State Bar of California; currently own Milestone Law, a boutique business, intellectual property and estate planning law firm serving clients in Idaho and California; worked for Mitt Romney's 2008 and 2012 campaigns; served as undersecretary of election day operations for the Republican party of Iowa; law clerk for U.S. Attorney's Office, S.D. Iowa; manager for Utah-based SkyWest Airlines; spouse: Whitney.

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