

MINUTES
SENATE AGRICULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

DATE: Thursday, February 11, 2021

TIME: 8:00 A.M.

PLACE: Room WW53

MEMBERS PRESENT: Vice Chairman Bayer, Senators Patrick, Zito, Ricks, Nelson, and Rabe

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: Chairman Burtenshaw, Senators Den Hartog, and Johnson

NOTE: The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

CONVENED: **Vice Chairman Bayer** called the meeting of the Senate Agricultural Affairs Committee (Committee) to order at 8:00 a.m.

MINUTES APPROVAL: **Senator Ricks** moved to approve the Minutes of January 26, 2021. **Senator Patrick** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

RS 28511 **A Concurrent Resolution Authorizing the Idaho Wheat Commission (IWC) to Enter Into Agreements with the Idaho State Building Authority (ISBA).** **Casey Chumrau**, Executive Director, IWC, proposed to allow IWC to enter into negotiations with ISBA in the construction of a new building. She stated the current building that IWC occupies was built in 1945, and houses multiple agricultural commissions and associations. She emphasized IWC will pay off the construction costs using its dedicated funds.

MOTION: **Senator Nelson** moved to send **RS 28511** to print. **Senator Patrick** seconded the motion. The motion passed by **voice vote**.

H 50 **Relating to Food Quality Assurance Institute.** **Chanel Tewalt**, Chief Operating Officer, Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA), detailed **H 50**, which repeals Idaho Code Chapter 83, Title 67 governing the Idaho Food Quality Assurance Institute (IFQAI). She described the history of IFQAI and how ISDA took over its Idaho Food Quality Assurance Laboratory (IFQAL) in 2005. She pointed out that IFQAI has not managed IFQAL's daily operations and financial responsibilities for more than a decade, and only serves as an advisory committee. IFQAI has transferred its duties to ISDA through memoranda of understanding (MoUs). She explained **H 50** would codify what was established through the MoUs. Furthermore, she said the bill will save the State time and money associated with legal costs and operations in implementing MoUs.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Nelson** asked about Idaho Code § 67-8304, which deals with IFQAI's authority. **Ms. Tewalt** replied that there is no specific statute in place for the transfer of powers from IFQAI to ISDA. Nevertheless, IFQAL will operate within ISDA's broad authority.

MOTION: **Senator Nelson** moved to send **H 50** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Zito** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

PRESENTATION: **Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission (ISWCC) Annual Report.** **Teri Murrison**, Administrator, ISWCC, spoke on its mission, organizational chart, manpower, and core functions. She stated ISWCC works with many partners, like Idaho's 50 conservation districts, to conserve, sustain, improve, and enhance soil, water, air, plant, and animal resources. (Refer to Attachment 1.)

Ms. Murrison presented the 2020 budget as shown in Attachment 2. She also discussed ISWCC's accomplishments in recent years, namely its compliance with the Governor's Red Tape Reduction Act, its adoption of performance measures, its financial and technical assistance to Idaho conservation districts, and other programs and projects. Moreover, she talked about how limited operating and project funding has affected the assistance they provided to the districts. (Refer to Attachment 3.)

Ms. Murrison reported that the adoption of performance measure program helps ISWCC understand what percentage of the districts are satisfied with its support and service. She briefly went through the last 10 years of the satisfaction survey as shown in Attachment 3. **Ms. Murrison** mentioned some districts sought for changes in ISWCC rules, Thus, there is an on-going robust discussions between districts and ISWCC regarding the allocation of funds. She said the proposed changes would need legislative action.

In conclusion, **Ms. Murrison** stated that ISWCC provides high-level service to landowners, partners, and the public to promote agricultural stewardship.

DISCUSSION: **Vice Chairman Bayer** asked about the low-interest loan program. **Ms. Murrison** stated that ISWCC's interest rates started at 2.5 percent and went up accordingly. She added that ISWCC uses dedicated funds for the program and ISWCC Commissioners are closely monitoring it.

Senator Rabe requested Ms. Murrison to name some of ISWCC's projects. **Ms. Murrison** cited a few projects in Pioneer Mountain, Teton Valley, and North Idaho. She mentioned that ISWCC has an online project tracker that features its projects, activities, and stewardships.

PRESENTATION: **LSO Idaho State Department of Agriculture Budget Report. Rob Sepich**, Budget and Policy Analyst, Legislative Services Office (LSO), discussed in detail the history of the ISDA operating budget as published in the fiscal year 2022 Idaho Legislative Budget Book. He pointed out that 20 percent of the appropriated budget in 2020 has not been utilized. He also mentioned that there is a decrease of full-time positions from 2020 to 2022 due to the consolidation of ISDA information technology staff to the Office of Information Technology Services (ITS).

DISCUSSION: **Vice Chairman Bayer** questioned the progression of invasive species funds. **Mr. Sepich** replied that an additional expenditure in 2018 related to the issues on watercraft stations accounted for the decrease of funds in 2019. On the other hand, he mentioned there was an increase in funds in 2020 due to Idaho's population growth, which increased sales of boats and boat registrations.

PRESENTATION: **Mr. Sepich** discussed the comparative summary of ISDA's request compared to the Governor's budget recommendation. He highlighted a 3 percent decrease on the budget that the Governor recommended. The decrease is due to items such as the change of employee compensation (CEC) and benefit costs.

DISCUSSION: In response to a question by Senator Nelson regarding risk management costs, **Mr. Sepich** affirmed the costs were related to insurance for vehicles, equipment, and cyber security.

PRESENTATION: **Mr. Sepich** addressed the Committee about ISDA's requests for an increase of funds to hire a laboratory technician, ITS's request to procure a Microsoft Office 365 subscription, and a 1% CEC and health insurance increase for fresh fruit and vegetable inspectors.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Nelson** asked Mr. Sepich to elaborate on the Microsoft Office 365 subscription. **Mr. Sepich** replied that he will check with ITS on the itemized cost. He emphasized that the cost is negotiated on Statewide basis by ITS.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business at this time, **Vice Chairman Bayer** adjourned the meeting at 8:54 a.m.

Senator Bayer
Vice Chair

Rellie Wisdom
Secretary