

MINUTES  
**SENATE AGRICULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** Thursday, March 03, 2022

**TIME:** 8:00 A.M.

**PLACE:** Room WW53

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chairman Burtenshaw, Acting Senator Bayer, Senators Patrick, Den Hartog, Blair (Johnson), Zito, Ricks, and Semmelroth

**ABSENT/ EXCUSED:** Senator Nelson

**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:** **Chairman Burtenshaw** called the meeting of the Senate Agricultural Affairs Committee (Committee) to order at 8:02 a.m.

**MINUTES APPROVAL:** **Chairman Burtenshaw** announced the Minutes of February 22, 2022 would be approved at a subsequent meeting.

**Senator Blair** moved to approve the Minutes of February 24, 2022. **Senator Ricks** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

**S 1344** **RURAL VETERINARIANS LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM** - Adds to existing law to establish a loan repayment program for rural veterinarians who treat large animals.

**Senator Stennett** stated the bill would create a program to fund a maximum of three annual \$25,000 loan repayments per student, supporting up to ten large animal veterinarians per year. **Senator Stennett** reported that the program would help alleviate a shortage of large animal veterinarians by encouraging veterinary students to practice in Idaho. **Senator Stennett** provided a handout with proposed amendments to the bill. She explained the bill would be changed to create an advisory committee instead of a board for Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) oversight of the program. She asked the Committee to send **S 1344** to the 14th Order of Business.

**DISCUSSION:** **Senator Ricks** asked for further information regarding the change to an advisory committee. **Senator Stennett** responded that an advisory committee would be easier for the ISDA to administer.

**Senator Blair** inquired about the average debt load for graduating veterinarians. **Dr. Scott Leibsle**, Administrator, Division of Animal Industries, ISDA, introduced himself to the Committee. **Dr. Leibsle** reported the average debt load for a veterinarian is more than \$200,000. He said students attending out-of-state or private schools could incur as much as \$300,000 to \$350,000 of debt.

**Senator Blair** asked the average starting salary for a new veterinarian. **Dr. Leibsle** explained that a small animal veterinarian in an urban area would average \$100,000 per year. He observed a large animal veterinarian had to live in a rural area with fewer patients. He said the average earnings would be \$60,000 to \$70,000 per year while establishing a practice. **Dr. Leibsle** noted the federal government established a similar competitive loan repayment program. He advised last year Idaho received 3 out of 130 total awards nationwide.

In response to questions from **Senator Semmelroth** about tax status of the loan repayments, **Senator Stennett** answered that grants were not usually taxable but she would research the question. **Senator Semmelroth** asked about other loan repayment programs. **Senator Stennett** replied that there were other highly competitive federal grants. She added there were no training facilities for veterinarians in Idaho.

In response to questions from **Senator Ricks** about the source of funding for the program, **Senator Stennett** answered that a student receiving any other loan repayment assistance would be ineligible for the new program. She said the program would be paid for by a General Fund appropriation to the ISDA. She added that outside contributions would also be accepted.

**Senator Blair** inquired about the current shortfall of large animal veterinarians in Idaho. **Dr. Leibsle** responded that many veterinarians have a mixed practice of large and small animals. He noted that large animal veterinarians often shifted to a small animal practice as they progressed in their careers. He reported 181 Idaho veterinarians did cattle work in 2020. He stated the top 16 cattle population counties had more than one half the large animal veterinarians, and one half of them were over age 50. **Senator Stennett** commented that it was very difficult to find an available veterinarian in some rural areas.

**TESTIMONY:**

**Joseph Howell**, Emmett, Idaho, testified in support of **S 1344** because his family's ranching business relied on veterinary services. He provided information on illnesses affecting the cattle industry.

**Patxi Larrocea-Phillips**, Idaho Wool Growers Association (IWGA), testified in support of **S 1344** because IWGA members relied on veterinarians to maintain flock health. He reported the Idaho Food Producers also voted to support the bill.

**Senator Den Hartog** asked if the IWGA had taken any action to provide incentives or recruit veterinarians. **Mr. Larrocea-Phillips** replied that it was a national association priority to recruit large animal veterinarians.

**Bob Naerebout**, Idaho Dairymen's Association (IDA), testified in support of **S 1344**. **Mr. Naerebout** reported that large animal veterinarians often left that practice because they could make more money with a small animal practice. He commented that the livestock industry was important to Idaho.

**Senator Den Hartog** asked if the IDA had taken any action to provide incentives or recruit veterinarians. **Mr. Naerebout** replied that the national association tried to identify ways to engage and incentivize large animal veterinarians. He added that the bill would primarily benefit smaller producers without in-house veterinarians.

**Braden Jensen**, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation (IFBF), testified in support of **S 1344** for the same reasons stated in previous testimony. **Mr. Jensen** reported that IFBF policy was to support any type of incentive. He stated the IFBF had worked to expand the number of seats for Idaho students in other states' veterinary programs.

**Senator Den Hartog** asked if Mr. Jensen was concerned there was no length of stay requirement in the legislation. **Mr. Jensen** answered that the IFBF would appreciate seeing more incentives for veterinarians to remain in Idaho longer.

**Wyatt Prescott**, Idaho Cattle Association (ICA), testified in support of **S 1344** for the same reasons stated in previous testimony. **Mr. Prescott** advised that new federal regulations have increased the cattle industry's need for veterinarians. He reported the national association has some grant programs but Idaho must compete with other states.

**Senator Ricks** questioned whether the bill contained any requirements to stay in Idaho for a period of time. **Mr. Prescott** responded that he did not think so. He observed that once a veterinary student practiced in a community, there was a greater likelihood the veterinarian would stay. He added the challenge was encouraging a student to choose a large animal practice.

**Senator Stennett** declared the bill did not contain a length of stay requirement. She said the advisory committee would establish the criteria for a loan repayment award. **Senator Stennett** remarked it would be part of the application process to ask whether a student planned to stay in Idaho. She averred the program should be dynamic to meet future needs.

**Senator Blair** expressed some reservations about the bill. He referenced a similar bill for education which was a constitutionally mandated State obligation. He expressed concern that the taxpayers would pay for an option program without a guarantee of future service.

**MOTION:** **Senator Blair** moved to send **S 1344** to the 14th Order of Business for possible amendment. **Senator Patrick** seconded the motion.

**SUBSTITUTE MOTION:** **Senator Ricks** moved to hold **S 1344** in Committee. **Senator Zito** seconded the motion.

**DISCUSSION:** **Senator Ricks** observed the bill contained some good ideas but it needed work. He said the proposed amendment did not address the concerns raised.

**Senator Zito** agreed with Senator Ricks. She added that the bill was industry specific and funding should come from industry. She voiced her support for the substitute motion.

**ROLL CALL VOTE:** **Chairman Burtenshaw** called for a roll call vote on the substitute motion. **Acting Senator Bayer**, **Senators Den Hartog, Zito**, and **Ricks** voted aye. **Senators Patrick, Blair, Semmelroth**, and **Chairman Burtenshaw** voted nay. The substitute motion to hold **S 1344** in Committee failed.

**ROLL CALL VOTE:** **Chairman Burtenshaw** called for a roll call vote on the original motion. **Senators Patrick, Blair, Semmelroth**, and **Chairman Burtenshaw** voted aye. **Acting Senator Bayer**, **Senators Den Hartog, Zito**, and **Ricks** voted nay. The motion to send **S 1344** to the 14th Order of Business for possible amendment failed.

**H 606** **RIGHT TO FARM** - Amends existing law to revise a definition.

**David Lehman**, Executive Director, Idaho Agricultural Aviation Association, presented the bill to protect farming activities from nuisance claims. **Mr. Lehman** reported an increase in complaints from newcomers to rural areas about aircraft spraying pesticides and herbicides. He explained the bill would expand the definition of an "agricultural operation" to include ingress and egress to agricultural lands or treatment areas. He noted the bill passed the House unanimously and had the support of industry partners.

**DISCUSSION:** **Senator Zito** remarked that the bill was especially important for specialty crop production. She thanked Mr. Lehman for bringing the bill.

**TESTIMONY:** **Braden Jensen**, IBBF, testified in support of **H 606** because it was an appropriate expansion of the Right to Farm Act.

**MOTION:** **Senator Blair** moved to send **H 606** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Ricks** seconded the motion.

**DISCUSSION:** **Senator Patrick** commented that it was so difficult to farm an 80-acre parcel once it became surrounded by housing that he decided to sell the property.

**VOICE VOTE:** The motion to send **H 606** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation carried by **voice vote**.

**PRESENTATION: Idaho Water Resource Board Update.** **Jeff Raybould**, Chairman, Idaho Water Resource Board (IWRB), provided an update on statewide water project funding. **Mr. Raybould** reported a \$75 million appropriation from the General Fund for grants and loans to update aging infrastructure. He identified several projects using \$100 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) money: (1) Anderson Ranch Dam raise; (2) Mountain Home Air Force Base water pipeline and pump station; and (3) aquifer recharge projects. He added that the IWRB worked with the Idaho Water Users Association (IWUA) to prepare a priority list of additional projects for the balance of available funding. **Mr. Raybould** reviewed the IWRB's current funding accounts.

**Mr. Raybould** gave an overview of IWRB activities. He reported the IWRB's flood management program was very successful. He described the progress of the IWRB aquifer recharge program. **Mr. Raybould** mentioned the IWRB collaborated with the IWUA and Idaho Power on the cloud seeding program. He said a benefits analysis would determine how to allocate user participation costs. **Mr. Raybould** stated a recent climatology assessment would inform future cloud seeding projects. He observed a new cloud seeding program takes several years to implement.

**Mr. Raybould** reviewed the work done at Priest Lake to rebuild the Thorofare area and outlet dam. He noted the Treasure Valley ground water model would be released this spring for ground water management purposes. **Mr. Raybould** said the IWRB funded a study on the Ririe Reservoir to allow more water storage. The IWRB also approved a settlement for the Lemhi Basin water rights.

**DISCUSSION: Senator Ricks** thanked Mr. Raybould for his work on the IWRB. He noted it is important to protect the State's water.

**Senator Den Hartog** asked about the IWRB's role in addressing water needs for new projects such as the planned data center in Kuna. **Mr. Raybould** replied that the IWRB oversees planing and projects, while the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR) oversees water rights and regulation. He said the IDWR would review new development for water rights issues.

**PRESENTATION: Paul Arrington**, IWUA, gave an overview of the history of Idaho's agricultural water use and issues facing Idaho water users (see Attachment 1). **Mr. Arrington** noted Idaho's "first in time, first in right" standard for determining water use priority. He reported an increase in competing demands for Idaho water. He presented statistics on irrigated acreage and the economic value of water storage for agriculture, recreation, power generation, and flood control. **Mr. Arrington** discussed the challenges of a growing population, aging infrastructure, water use conflicts, declining aquifers, climate change and drought, water quality, and external pressures. He provided estimates of future water needs. **Mr. Arrington** described the potential impacts of a renewed Columbia River Treaty between the United States and Canada. He explained Idaho's aquifer recharge program, the plan to raise Anderson Ranch Dam, and funding sources for water projects.

**ADJOURNED:** There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Burtenshaw** adjourned the meeting at 9:23 a.m.

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Senator Burtenshaw  
Chair

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Jeanne Jackson-Heim  
Secretary