

MINUTES
JOINT FINANCE-APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

DATE: Friday, February 20, 2015

TIME: 8:00 A.M.

PLACE: LINCOLN AUDITORIUM WW02

MEMBERS PRESENT: Senators Co-chairman Cameron, Keough, Mortimer, Nuxoll, Johnson, Thayn, Guthrie, Schmidt, Lacey

Representatives Co-chairman Bell, Gibbs, Miller, Youngblood, Horman, Malek, Monks, King, Gannon

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: Bair, Burtenshaw

CONVENED: Senator Cameron convened the meeting at 8:03 A.M.

STAFF PRESENT: Holland-Smith, Burns, Houston, Headlee, Bybee, Lockett, Tatro, Hoskins

PUBLIC HEARING: **PUBLIC LISTENING HEARING ON BUDGET-RELATED ISSUES**

Penni Cyr, representing the Idaho Education Association, said Idaho must take significant action in order to be able to attract and retain high-quality teachers. To meet this goal, she suggested the following: 1) pay teachers a professional wage that is competitive with surrounding states and other industries, 2) increase discretionary funding—because of funding shortfalls, programs have been cut, there are larger class sizes, outdated technology and buildings in disrepair, and 3) allocate funds for professional development so teachers get the best possible continuing education—collaboration and mentoring are important; everyone benefits when teachers share ideas and techniques. Idaho has seen an increase of more than 100 classroom units since 2009 which has caused public education to pay a steep price. The State needs to be on a course that benefits teachers, students, schools and communities.

Phil Homer, representing the Idaho Association of School Administrators, listed three priorities for education in public schools: 1) restore discretionary funding, 2) compensate the teaching staff and provide professional development and technology—he urged the legislators to move as quickly as possible to pay teachers at the \$40,000 level, and 3) support the Idaho Digital Learning Academy (IDLA).

Kendra Wisenbaker, President of the Meridian Education Association, said giving money to schools will help them be more successful because: 1) it will enable school districts to purchase land and build more schools to house the increasing student population, 2) current overcrowding limits a teacher's ability to work with students individually, 3) schools need to pay teachers more in order to retain them so they will not leave the district or state due to inadequate salaries, and 4) it will provide professional development so teachers will be better prepared to assist students. The students' basic needs must be met in order for them to take advantage of educational opportunities.

Donna Yule, Executive Director of the Idaho Public Employees Association, requested that the Committee not fund more tax breaks but fund state needs, especially by increasing salaries for state employees. She provided recent research from the Idaho Center for Fiscal Policy entitled, "Is Idaho's Budget Balanced?" The report concluded that now revenues are rebounding, lawmakers are in a good position to better fund schools and to address the neglected infrastructure. The proposed budget leaves Idaho short on the funds needed to deliver the services that businesses and residents expect. Additional cuts to revenue could jeopardize goals including education investment.

Susan Perkins, representing the Idaho Counseling Association, said jails and prisons are the number one place to find mental health patients. She suggested that people think of their worst day when they were not productive; many people live most days of their lives that way if they have a mental illness or suffer with depression. It would be much more cost effective to spend money on prevention rather than putting people in jail. Depression is the biggest reason people miss work. Money needs to be spent on prevention.

Karen Echeverria, Executive Director for the Idaho School Boards Association, said her association has three funding priorities: 1) restoring operational funds, 2) funding to ensure continuing broadband in the schools, and 3) increasing teachers' salaries.

Sylvia Chariton, representing the American Association of University Women (AAUW) spoke in support of Pre-K programs and indicated that Idaho is one of only eleven states without a Pre-K program. School districts do provide programs if these younger children have developmental disabilities but low-income families should be provided educational Pre-K opportunities also.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business to come before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 8:30 A.M.

Senator Cameron
Chair

Peggy Moyer
Secretary