

MINUTES
HOUSE STATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

DATE: Tuesday, February 25, 2020

TIME: 8:30 A.M.

PLACE: Room EW40

MEMBERS: Chairman Harris, Vice Chairman Armstrong, Representatives Crane, Palmer, Barbieri, Holtzclaw, Monks, Zito, Scott, Andrus, Hartgen, Young, Smith, Gannon, Green

**ABSENT/
EXCUSED:** Armstrong

GUESTS: Kevin Glenn, Michael Law, Rob Winslow, IHSA, Shawn Tiegu, Nez Perce School District, Kelli Brassfield, IAC, Justin Ruen, Association of Idaho Cities, Karen Echeverria, Paul Stark, Quinn Perry, Misty Swanson, ISBA, Jonathan Gillen, Brian Smith, West Ada School District, Russ Hendricks, Idaho Farm Bureau, Paula Kellerer, Randy Dewy, Allison Westfeld, Nampa School District, Devyn Hinson, Madison Cares, Jamie Anderson, BYU-Idaho

Chairman Harris called the meeting to order at 8:30 AM.

H 393: **Rep. Horman** said the effort for **H 393** started with frustrated voters who did not have good information about off-cycle elections. She said voter turnout for these off-cycle elections is low and people miss elections they wanted to vote in because they don't have the right information. Rep. Horman noted support for **H 393** exists across the political spectrum. Recognizing concerns about the effects of **H 393** on schools, she believes **H 393** will help create better community engagement on the issues.

Sen. Lori Den Hartog, a co-sponsor on **H 393**, said voter turnout is important for bonds and levies, which in turn affects property taxes. She said people should be involved in school issues but turnout is low. Sen. Den Hartog said schools have made a valiant attempt to educate the public but it can still be difficult for voters to find information. There is a cost benefit for consolidated elections.

In response to committee questions, **Sen. Den Hartog** said **H 393** focuses on types of questions that have the greatest impact for most voters. Sen. Den Hartog said off-cycle elections can cut across counties based on school districts. She said school district elections are not necessarily county-wide because school districts do not follow county lines. Sen. Den Hartog said she was unsure how **H 393** would affect recall elections but she would look into it. Sen. Den Hartog said **H 393** was primarily constituent-driven and **Rep. Horman** said she spoke with school districts and school boards after the print hearing.

Rob Winslow, Executive Director of the Idaho Association of School Administrators, and **Karen Echeverria**, Executive Director of the Idaho School Board Association testified in opposition to **H 393**. Mr. Winslow said school boards decide when to run elections and the association implements them. He testified information is posted on each school's website and Facebook and is communicated through emergency alert systems, posters in the community and public forums. Ms. Echeverria said the district goes to great lengths to make sure people know about elections and it is the voters' fault if they don't know the election dates. He said off-cycle elections often accommodate farmers in rural Idaho and the school boards do not enjoy running elections. Ms. Echeverria noted election dates are timed around teacher negotiations and budgets.

In response to committee questions, **Mr. Winslow** said each community picks the best time for themselves. Mr. Winslow said the challenge is disseminating information and that primarily depends on the community and its use of media because the association cannot lobby, just provide factual information.

In response to committee questions, **Ms. Echeverria** said elections were originally consolidated to address voter fatigue concerns and it is difficult to raise awareness about issues on the ballot with presidential, state and local elections. Ms. Echeverria said school boards were approached about the legislation but felt like there was little room for negotiation. She explained bonds go to facilities and levies typically go toward salaries and benefits.

Shawn Tiegu, Nez Perce School District Superintendent, testified **in opposition to H 393**. He said the timing of elections is critical for budgets. He said this legislation strips local control by consolidating election dates.

Michael Law and **Kevin Glenn** testified **in support of H 393**. Mr. Glenn said the school boards only market elections to certain parties and the process in place has been exploited. They said bonds and levies are run far too frequently and build animosity and frustration among voters. They emphasized the money this bill saves on running elections and suggested school districts would be more cognizant of the will of the people if they had less frequent elections.

Paul Stark, general counsel for the Idaho Education Association, testified **in opposition to H 393**. He said if the real issue is participation or a better-informed electorate, there are other ways to do it. Mr. Stark said the community decides whether they pay for bonds and levies and cutting funds cuts children's education.

Allison Westfeld, Vice Chair of the Nampa High School Board of Trustees, testified **in opposition to H 393**. She said the strongest participation has been in November and March and the district does look at voter demographics. She emphasized how the school district is working with voters to inform them and help them understand the issues and the four dates provide flexibility for districts.

Russ Hendricks, Idaho Farm Bureau, testified **in support of H 393**. He said **H 393** brings school districts into alignment with other local elections. **H 393** would not take away local control and many people said they have chosen to run their elections in May or November because it works well for them. Consolidating elections will help voters be better informed and allow a greater number of people to participate, but it won't necessarily change the outcome.

In response to committee questions, **Mr. Hendricks** said the Farm Bureau feels comfortable **H 393** leaves opportunities for recall elections to be held.

In closing, **Rep. Horman** said she did meet and listen to education lobby groups and did not hear any concerns unsolvable by running elections in May and November. She said her intent was not to have more levies fail but the current culture is one in which school districts run elections all the time.

MOTION:

Rep. Palmer made a motion to send **H 393** to the floor with a **DO PASS** recommendation.

During discussion on the motion, committee members expressed concern about eliminating election dates based on the impact they would have on rural districts and farmers as well as their effect on school planning.

SUBSTITUTE MOTION:

Rep. Gannon made a substitute motion to send **H 393** to General Orders. Speaking to his motion, Rep. Gannon said the real solution is to fund the education system adequately at the state level and **H 393** makes the situation worse by restricting education funding alternatives. He also expressed concern about the effect of **H 393** on recall elections.

Rep. Crane spoke in support of the original motion. He said the only voter fatigue he has heard about is people who are tired of voting over and over again on the same bond.

**ROLL CALL
VOTE ON
SUBSTITUTE
MOTION:**

Rep. Smith requested a roll call vote on the substitute motion. **Motion failed by a vote of 3 AYE, 11 NAY, 1 ABSENT/EXCUSED. Voting in favor** of the substitute motion: **Reps. Smith, Gannon, Green. Voting in opposition** to the substitute motion: **Reps. Harris, Crane, Palmer, Barbieri, Holtzclaw, Monks, Zito, Scott, Andrus, Hartgen, Young. Rep. Armstrong was ABSENT/EXCUSED.**

During discussion on the original motion, committee members expressed concern that school boards and school districts were not involved in the creation of the bill. Other committee members said the process has been exploited over the years and **H 393** addresses that issue.

**ROLL CALL
VOTE ON
ORIGINAL
MOTION:**

Rep. Smith requested a roll call vote on the original motion. **Motion carried by a vote of 11 AYE, 3 NAY, 1 ABSENT/EXCUSED. Voting in favor** of the original motion: **Reps. Harris, Crane, Palmer, Barbieri, Holtzclaw, Monks, Zito, Scott, Andrus, Hartgen, Young. Voting in opposition** to the motion: **Reps. Smith, Gannon, Green. Rep. Armstrong was ABSENT/EXCUSED. Rep. Horman** will sponsor the bill on the floor.

S 1269:

Rep. Troy said **S 1269** ensures ballots are secured until the recount opportunity window is closed.

MOTION:

Rep. Andrus made a motion to send **S 1269** to the floor with a **DO PASS** recommendation. **Motion carried by voice vote. Rep. Troy** will sponsor the bill on the floor.

S 1306:

Rep. Troy said **S 1306** allows cities to not hold an election if it is an uncontested election.

In response to committee questions, **Rep. Troy** said it is her understanding cities are the only ones that cannot choose not to hold an election for an uncontested position.

Justin Ruen, Idaho Association of Counties, testified in support of **S 1306**.

Kelly Brassfield, Idaho Association of Counties, yielded to **Phil McGrane**, Ada County Clerk. He testified in support of the bill and said this process is mirrored in every other taxing district.

MOTION:

Rep. Hartgen made a motion to send **S 1306** to the floor with a **DO PASS** recommendation. **Motion carried by voice vote. Rep. Troy** will sponsor the bill on the floor.

ADJOURN:

There being no further business to come before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 9:57 AM.

Representative Harris
Chair

Devon Powers
Secretary