

MINUTES
SENATE STATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

DATE: Wednesday, February 18, 2026

TIME: 8:00 A.M.

PLACE: Room WW55

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Guthrie, Vice Chairman Bernt, Senators Hawkins (Anthon), Harris, Toews, Den Hartog, Adams, Shippy, and Ruchti

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: None

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 Guthrie** called the meeting of the Senate State Affairs Committee (Committee) to order at 8:00 a.m.

WELCOME: **Chairman Guthrie** welcomed Mayor Joan Hawkins of Malad, Idaho who was stepping in for Senator Anthon. **Acting Senator Hawkins** said that she was enjoying her time in the Senate and believed it was a good opportunity to meet legislators and learn more about the process. **Chairman Guthrie** asked how long Acting Senator Hawkins had been Mayor of Malad. She shared it had been 14 years and she had 2 years left in her current term.

MINUTES APPROVAL: **Senator Adams** moved to approve the Minutes of February 11, 2026. **Senator Toews** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

MINUTES APPROVAL: **Senator Harris** moved to approve the Minutes of February 13, 2026. **Senator Den Hartog** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

MINUTES APPROVAL: **Senator Bernt** moved to approve the Minutes of February 16, 2026. **Senator Ruchti** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

RS 33441 **INL, Expansion of Research and Development.** **Senator Lent** shared that he worked on this legislation with the Attorney General's Office and it had to do with new nuclear projects they wanted to bring to the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory. **Senator Lent** believed that this resolution would open Idaho to significant changes in light of recent requests made for information regarding the resurgence of the nuclear industry in our country.

MOTION: **Senator Toews** moved to send **RS 33441** to print. **Senator Den Hartog** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Den Hartog** noted that all Senators presenting an RS needed to make sure that the fiscal note was filled out properly, and if there was no impact on Idaho's General Fund, the reason for that needed to be noted as well.

RS 32911 **Code Cleanup, State Controller.** **Senator Blaylock** shared this was an effort to cleanup Idaho Code regarding the State Controller's office and comply with the Idaho Code Cleanup Act passed in 2025.

MOTION: **Senator Adams** moved to send **RS 32911** to print. **Senator Toews** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

RS 33141C1 **State Agencies, Agreement.** **Senator Blaylock** said that this legislation strengthened an existing statute that required agencies to disclose specific information about agreements and contracts.

MOTION: **Senator Shippy** moved to send **RS 33141C1** to print. **Senator Den Hartog** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

RS 33386 **Affidavit in Lieu of Identification.** **Senator Lenney** explained that this was the revised version of his previous voter affidavit legislation. This version would not eliminate voter affidavits as a whole, but instead require the voter to have their date of birth or driver's license number verified before filling out a ballot.

MOTION: **Senator Harris** moved to send **RS 33386** to print. **Senator Adams** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

RS 33136 **Refugee Resettlement, Audit.** **Senator Lenney** said that refugee resettlement programs had been running for the last 50 years but none of the key organizations were in Idaho Code. He explained this would be an audit for information requiring those organizations to answer to the State.

MOTION: **Senator Den Hartog** moved to send **RS 33136** to print. **Senator Bernt** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

RS 33321 **Gold, Silver, Specie.** **Senator Hart** explained this legislation would strengthen Idaho Code for those who wanted to do commerce in gold and silver and would enforce contracts made by those who use gold and silver as a form of payment.

MOTION: **Senator Toews** moved to send **RS 33321** to print. **Senator Harris** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

RS 33028 **Precinct Committeemen.** **Senator Hart** shared that this legislation would allow local committees to add criteria used in deciding who can be committeemen.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Ruchti** asked Senator Hart what the remedy would be in the instance local committees implemented criteria deemed to be discriminatory. **Senator Hart** said that if it was a civil liberties discrimination that it would most likely be handled by lawsuit. **Senator Hart** shared an example of current criteria where the committeemen would voluntarily vacate their seat if four meetings in a row were missed. **Senator Adams** asked if there were other counties that had implemented that vacancy criteria. **Senator Hart** said yes, but could not name specific counties.

MOTION: **Senator Toews** moved to send **RS 33028** to print. **Senator Den Hartog** seconded the motion.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Ruchti** noted that he saw several potential problems with this legislation but would vote to send the legislation to print.

VOICE VOTE: The motion to send **RS 33028** to print carried by **voice vote**.

RS 33338 **Judges, Vacancies, Residency.** **Senator Hart** explained that this legislation would prevent those appointed to fill a vacancy for a judge from running in the next election. He believed this was necessary because incumbent judges are the most likely to be voted for.

MOTION: **Senator Shippy** moved to send **RS 33338** to print. **Senator Den Hartog** seconded the motion

DISCUSSION: **Senator Ruchti** explained that he could not support the motion. His main issue was that there would be very few people willing to fill judicial vacancies. He acknowledged how much judges give up to take on their roles and believes this would not be good for the judicial system if implemented.

MOTION: The motion to send **RS 33338** to print carried by **voice vote** with **Senator Ruchti** and **Senator Harris** having voted nay.

RS 33396 **Black and White License Plates.** **Senator Den Hartog** explained that this legislation would create a new specialty license plate and the proceeds of it would support salaries for the Idaho State Police.

- MOTION:** **Senator Harris** moved to send **RS 33396** to print. **Senator Toews** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.
- RS 33420** **Emergency Care Affordability Act.** **Senator Bernt** explained that this bill would create a new Chapter 67, Title 41 of Idaho Code to regulate billing and reimbursement practices for out-of-network, freestanding emergency rooms. He said it was meant to address how these facilities were reimbursed by insurance companies.
- MOTION:** **Senator Den Hartog** moved to send **RS 33420** to print. **Senator Harris** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.
- RS 33379** **Department of Lands, Legal Counsel.** **Senator Harris** explained this legislation was meant to clear up confusion for both the Attorney General's Office and the Department of Lands that stemmed from a past senate bill that allowed the Department of Lands to hire its own council.
- MOTION:** **Senator Bernt** moved to send **RS 33379** to print. **Senator Den Hartog** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.
- RS 33382** **Property Rights, Protection.** **Senator Harris** shared that this legislation was an effort to protect private property rights from unsolicited visits from law enforcement without a warrant.
- MOTION:** **Senator Shippy** moved to send **RS 33382** to print. **Senator Den Hartog** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.
- H 613** **POLLING PLACES- Amends existing law to provide for the securing of liability insurance coverage for private facilities used as polling places and to limit liability for private facilities used as polling places on election day.** **Senator Harris** yielded time to Representative Britt Raybould of District 34. She explained the time factor associated with this legislation as 2026 was an election year. **Representative Raybould** shared that this would reduce civil liability for facilities acting as a polling locations through the Secretary of State's self insured policy provided by the Department of Administration. She shared this would not have any impact on the General Fund because it extended existing coverage.
- DISCUSSION:** **Senator Ruchti** clarified that this legislation would have the State bear the liability burden rather than the private entity volunteering to act as a polling location, which **Representative Raybould** confirmed, but this extended to election activities only. **Senator Ruchti** proposed a hypothetical on-site injury and asked such situation would be dealt with. **Representative Raybould** explained that the language specified that in such a case, it would have to be proven that the activity in question was relevant to the person being in the building for election purposes and covered only the designated polling time frame.
- MOTION:** **Senator Adams** motioned to send **H 613** to the Senate floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Bernt** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.
- PRESENTATION:** **Acknowledgement of Page- Chayse Van Eps.** **Chairman Guthrie** thanked Chayse Van Eps for the work she had done for the Committee during her time as a Page and invited her to talk about her experience. **Ms. Van Eps** shared that she had learned a lot about the legislative process and that her outlook on it had changed since she started. She explained the hands-on experience she gained at the Senate had a humanizing effect on politics and policy.

DISCUSSION: **Chairman Guthrie** asked what her future plan was. **Ms. Van Eps** said that she planned to attend BYU Hawaii after graduation and that this experience helped her narrow down her interest in pursuing a journalism or communications career. She said that she admired the Senators' ability to communicate clearly and speak with eloquence. **Ms. Van Eps** told Senator Den Hartog how inspiring it had been for her to see a woman in such a powerful leadership position and asked her what advice she had for young women aspiring to pursue a political career one day. **Senator Den Hartog** said it was important to stay true to yourself and your principles and consistently stand firm in your beliefs. She said that honesty and open-mindedness can take someone far, and that applied to women in any field.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Guthrie** adjourned the meeting at 8:38 a.m.

Senator Guthrie
Chair

Abby Rowe
Secretary