

MINUTES
SENATE STATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

- DATE:** Monday, February 23, 2026
- TIME:** 8:00 A.M.
- PLACE:** Room WW55
- MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chairman Guthrie, Vice Chairman Bernt, Senators 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.
- PRESENTATION:** **Introduction of Page - Drew Brown.** **Mr. Brown** shared he was from Eagle, Idaho, and attended Eagle High School. He currently enjoyed his law enforcement class and was excited to enter the Senate Page Program. After graduation, he planned to serve a mission for his church. **Mr. Brown** explained that he wanted a future career in law enforcement, starting as a deputy then working his way up to work for the Federal Bureau of Investigation or Special Weapons And Tactics team.
- DISCUSSION:** **Senator Bernt** pointed out Max and Sally Brown, Mr. Brown's parents, who were in the audience and shared what a great family he knew them to be. **Chairman Guthrie** prompted Mr. Brown to pose a question to a Committee member of his choosing. **Mr. Brown** asked Senator Den Hartog what she believed to be the most challenging part of being a Senator was. **Senator Den Hartog** explained that her and her colleagues all had very strong personalities and solutions to problems that were important to them. She shared it could be a challenge when fellow Senators believed in the proposed solution, but it turned out not to be popular among peers. **Senator Den Hartog** expressed that it was often difficult to shut down other people's ideas, as well as have ideas she believed in be shut down.
- GUBERNATORIAL APPOINTMENT:** **Committee Consideration of the Gubernatorial Appointment of Cally Younger as Administrator of the Office of Energy and Mineral Resources** to serve a term commencing March 17, 2025 and continuing at the pleasure of the Governor. **Ms. Younger** shared that she graduated from Northwest Nazarene Univeristy with a Bachelor's Degree and University of Idaho with her law degree. She briefly explained her professional background including her time working for the Department of Interior, the Solicitor General's Office, and former Governor Otter. She shared she had worked extensively on nuclear policy, public land management, and natural resources. During her time as Administrator of the Office of Energy and Mineral Resources, **Ms. Younger** said she played a role in administering grants to parts of rural Idaho, the creation of a nuclear energy task force, and worked closely with mining companies and other government energy priorities.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Harris** asked Ms. Younger her thoughts on the merging of the Office of Energy and Mineral Resources and the Office of Species Conservation. **Ms. Younger** explained that she had worked for both agencies and that the agencies worked hand-in-hand. These agencies had similar functions and their work often overlapped. **Ms. Younger** supported the merge and believed that it would be wise to leverage both of their funds in order to create a more comprehensive portfolio.

RS 33435 **Civics Education.** **Senator Anthon** explained he had worked on this legislation with the State Department of Education for quite some time. He shared its purpose was to codify existing civics education requirements for Idaho's public schools in order to reinforce patriotism and promote an understanding of America's foundation. **Senator Anthon** said this would not just apply to American History and Government courses, but would also introduce complimentary instruction in English classes that would familiarize students with historical documents.

MOTION: **Senator Adams** moved to send **RS 33435** to print. **Senator Toews** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

RS 33460 **Irrigation District Directors.** **Senator Anthon** explained a current issue facing rural irrigation districts where those farming in the district did not live there, which caused difficulty when filling irrigation district boards. He shared this legislation would amend board requirements for small irrigation districts of 15,000 acres or less to allow more candidates the ability to fill board seats.

MOTION: **Senator Harris** moved to send **RS 33460** to print. **Senator Den Hartog** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

S 1300 **STATE GOVERNMENT - Amends current law to revise provisions regarding director appointments to certain executive agencies.** **Senator Okuniewicz** shared that this legislation would require the directors for the Departments of Fish and Game, Transportation, and Parks and Recreation to be Gubernatorially appointed and confirmed by the Senate. He explained that all other state agency directors were subject to Gubernatorial appointment and believed that these agencies should be no exception. **Senator Okuniewicz** said this reinforced the checks and balances system and created consistency across state agencies. He explained that in his experience, agencies who did not have Gubernatorially appointed directors were less collaborative and had little incentive to work alongside the Legislature, and this legislation addressed that issue.

TESTIMONY: **Nick Fasciano**, representing the Idaho Wildlife Federation, **Rob Thornberry**, representing the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, **Janice Brown** representing herself, **Erik Weiseth** representing the Idaho Outfitters and Guides Association, **Rick Just**, representing Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, **Michael Gibson**, representing Trout Unlimited, and **Jeff Binn**, representing the Idaho Outfitters and Guides Association testified in opposition to **S 1300** for the following reasons:

- Concerns about politicizing the process of appointing directors to Fish and Game and Parks and Recreation;
- Removing the ability of the Fish and Game Commission to hire and fire its directors;
- Changes made to a process that had worked well for decades;
- Concerns surrounding the future of the agreement between Idaho and Harriman State Park;
- Dual authority paradox for directors reporting to both the people and the Governor; and
- Under-qualified appointees who lacked the expertise required for the position.

DISCUSSION: **Chairman Guthrie** asked Mr. Fasciano if he could speak on the last time Fish and Game fired a Director. **Mr. Fasciano** did not know the answer. **Senator Anthon** asked Mr. Fasciano if this legislation to his understanding would change the ability of the commission to fire a director. **Mr. Fasciano** said the exact language used indicated that would most likely not be the case but he assumed in that situation a firing would be referred to the Governor. **Senator Toews** asked Mr. Fasciano about his reference to the initiative process and asked what the director selection process looked like before that process was implemented. Mr. Fasciano said he believed directors were Gubernatorially-appointed and subject to Senate confirmation.

Senator Shippy shared that last summer he was approached by countless Idaho sportsman who believed that directors for Fish and Game should be elected by the people due to the concern that directors who were not elected were not held accountable by the people they are serving. **Senator Shippy** asked Mr. Thornberry if he had heard similar concerns. **Mr. Thornberry** shared he had heard similar concerns but that he believed public involvement was at an all time high right now.

TESTIMONY: **Samuel Lair**, representing the Idaho Freedom Foundation, testified in support of **S 1300**. **Mr. Lair** said he believed in the principles of Idaho's constitution. He explained that the power the executive officers had to appoint positions and the power of the Senate to confirm appointees was fundamental to execution of proper electoral and constitutional authority.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Okuniewicz** closed the discussion by touching on several points brought up in testimony. He pointed out in relation to the dual authority concern that almost all state agency directors were Gubernatorially-appointed and the process worked just fine. He believed there were no concerns for over-politicizing these appointments because it was an innately political system and appointees were vetted and deemed qualified for the roles they were appointed to. He believed Gubernatorial appointees were still chosen based on merit rather than political agendas. **Senator Okuniewicz** mentioned that there were no realistic concerns related to the Harriman State Park agreement as those who owned the land had passed away. **Senator Ruchti** asked Senator Okuniewicz if the Attorney General's Office specified whether or not the Harriman State Park agreement did not pass down to future generations or if there was simply no enforcement method in place after their passing. **Senator Okuniewicz** said there was no enforcement method but that it was speculated that the agreement was not meant to apply to new generations.

MOTION: **Senator Toews** moved to send **S 1300** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Den Hartog** seconded the motion.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Adams** acknowledged the concerns regarding political influence on appointees but said these positions were innately political as they were state agencies. He believed this process was a good way to screen candidates and shared he would support the motion. **Senator Shippy** shared he was in favor of the motion because he believed the Senate had always done a great job confirming candidates who are qualified and talented. He said he rejected the idea posed by testifiers that these people were chosen for political reasons rather than their qualifications. **Senator Ruchti** said he was not in favor of the motion because he believed the current system worked fine and there was no need to change it. **Senator Bernt** said he would support the motion because he believed the Legislature did a good job protecting Idaho's parks and hunting practices and in his experience, Senate confirmations had been based on merit. **Senator Den Hartog** shared she did not believe Gubernatorial appointments and Senate confirmation were about control but instead about responsibility and accountability.

She believed there had historically been open dialogue and discussion, including input from the public, when it came to considering candidates.

VOICE VOTE: The motion to send **S 1300** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation carried by **voice vote** with **Senator Ruchti** voting nay.

S 1301 **BEER - Amends existing law to revise provisions regarding sales by certain licensed brewers. Senator Bernt** explained that this legislation supported small businesses by giving breweries the opportunity to have two remote tap rooms instead of the currently allotted one remote tap room. He shared he worked with the Idaho Beer and Wine Commission on this legislation and had their support.

TESTIMONY: **Jacob Black**, of Boise, Idaho, testified in favor of **S 1301**. **Mr. Black** shared he owned Lost Grove Brewing and the current tap room restrictions had hindered his ability to expand his business. He shared it had been hard to explain why one or two people could own most bars in Boise, but that his community-oriented business was not able to expand beyond one remote tap room. He said there were several checks and balances in place that monitor and ensure that local businesses and breweries were following the rules and allowing for more tap rooms would not change that.

TESTIMONY: **Mike Garcia**, of Meridian, Idaho, testified in favor of **S 1301**. **Mr. Garcia** explained that he served on the Idaho Breweries United Board and that he and his wife owned Loose Screw Brewery, which had become a lively part of their community. He explained that his brewery supported over 50 non-profits annually and that it was often an inclusive, civic-minded space for community engagement and would appreciate the ability to expand.

MOTION: **Senator Shippy** moved to send **S 1301** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Adams** seconded the motion.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Shippy** shared that he believed this was a good first step to help these businesses but thought legislation could go further in the future, including more than just two remote tap rooms. He said he was looking forward to legislation like this that allowed for small business growth in Idaho.

VOICE VOTE: The motion to send **S 1301** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation carried by **voice vote**.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Guthrie** adjourned the meeting at 9:18 a.m.

Senator Guthrie
Chair

Abby Rowe
Secretary