

MINUTES
JOINT FINANCE-APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

DATE: Thursday, February 26, 2026

TIME: 8:00 A.M.

PLACE: Room C310

MEMBERS PRESENT: Senators Co-chairman Grow, Woodward, Cook, Hart, Carlson, Zuiderveld, Galloway, Ward-Engelking, Wintrow

Representatives Co-chairman Tanner (14), Miller, Furniss, Petzke, Manwaring, Mitchell, Price, Bruce, Harris, Green

ABSENT/ Senators Bjerke (Bjerke)

EXCUSED:

CONVENED: **Co-Chairman Grow** called the meeting of the Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee (Committee) to order at **8:00 a.m.** with a quorum present.

GERMANE COMMITTEE PRESENTATION:

Senate Health & Welfare - Senator VanOrden, Chairman

Senator VanOrden, Senate Health & Welfare Co-Chair, presented before the Committee. She provided an overview of her committee's review of the Health and Welfare budget. She reported feedback from Senate Health & Welfare committee members, noting that one member observed that personnel in the Health & Welfare Department had increased since 2023, while work on benefits had decreased, and suggested more scrutiny of certain public health contracts and programs. Another member supported the Governor's 4% budget reductions for 2026 and commended the department for implementing reductions thoughtfully. That member also favored the Residential Rehabilitation option for \$22 million in the 2027 budget and emphasized the importance of protecting essential services when considering enhancement budgets. Senator Van Orden added her own perspective, expressing opposition to moving the 988 Suicide Crisis Service under the Behavioral Health managed care contract, arguing that it was better to keep those services separate until a comprehensive managed care system was fully established.

DISCUSSION: In response to Committee questions, **Senator VanOrden** provided additional information related to the 988 Suicide Crisis Hotline.

In response to a Committee question, **Co-Chair Tanner** stated he had been looking at managed care contractors and other contracts to identify potential cost savings. He noted that he liked the connection between managed care and behavioral health, seeing possible synergy and benefits. He added that more detailed analysis was underway and that he would feel more confident once updated information was provided.

In response to a Committee question, **Senator VanOrden** stated the Governor had proposed an ongoing 3% across-the-board adjustment for agencies and considered that a prudent approach for current and future planning. However, she stated that relying on broad, across-the-board cuts did not allow the legislature to fully do its due diligence.

Representative Vander Woude stood to answer questions from the Committee related to budget recissions, the Rural Health Fund

Representative John Vander Woude, Senate Health & Welfare Committee Co-Chair, stood to address the Committee. He stated he had a drafted bill that would help balance the budget and include guidelines for audits and accountability to ensure funds were spent appropriately. He emphasized the need for caution with rural health funding and stressed the importance of legislative oversight before authorizing large expenditures, warning against approving significant funding without proper controls in place. He expressed concern about shifting funds, particularly using money in ways he believed were not originally intended, and provider rates should be restored if revenues improved. He stated controlling spending required reducing or eliminating nonessential programs rather than increasing expenditures. He also noted that while he was following many of the Governor's recommendations, he believed additional measures—such as addressing Medicaid expansion—should also be considered in the future.

In response to Committee questions, the Health & Welfare Co-Chairs **Senator VanOrden** and **Representative John Vander Woude** provided more information. The Co-Chairs stated they had been looking at proposed legislation directing agencies—particularly Health and Welfare—to review programs not mandated in statute and report back on potential reductions. They acknowledged that identifying cuts can be difficult, and some programs, like adult dental services, are debated because while they may seem costly, their long-term savings are unclear due to limited data. They emphasized a broader tension between reducing costs and maintaining quality of life. Regarding budgeting and oversight, they stressed the need for clearer standards, better evaluation tools, and stronger auditing processes—particularly in programs like rehabilitation services. They explained that new legislation aimed to improve accountability and ensure funds were directed to those with the greatest need. They emphasized more detailed program evaluations, including better data and feedback mechanisms, would help determine whether programs were effective and worth their cost.

**GERMANE
COMMITTEE
PRESENTATION:**

House Agricultural Affairs - Representative Raymond, Chairman

Representative Jerald Raymond, Chairman of the House Agricultural Affairs committee, presented before the Committee. He stated the House Agriculture Committee was responsible for supporting the Idaho State Department of Agriculture and various commodity commissions, while working closely with producer groups and the University of Idaho to promote research and market development. He highlighted Idaho's strong and diverse agricultural output and its significant role in exporting food and agricultural products globally. He described how producers contributed not only through taxes but also through self-imposed fees that funded research, innovation, and market expansion, often benefiting the broader public. He also discussed the use of dedicated funds, such as those from boat registration fees, to cover specific costs like invasive species control without burdening the General Fund, and explained that some expenditures required additional spending authority due to budgeting mechanics. He addressed unforeseen expenses, such as outbreaks of

Mormon crickets , stressing the importance of monitoring and rapid response to protect agriculture, as these threats could cause severe economic and environmental damage.

DISCUSSION:

In response to Committee questions, Representative Raymond provided additional information. He explained that the deficiency warrants covered three main emergency agricultural threats: Mormon crickets, Japanese beetles, and Karnal bunt, ensuring the state could respond quickly to those issues. He emphasized that prevention—especially for invasive species like quagga mussels—was far more cost-effective than treatment, stressing the importance of maintaining boat inspection stations to stop infestations before they spread. He described how inspections worked, noting that boats were checked to ensure they were clean, drained, and dry, and if contamination was suspected, they were cleaned and sometimes barred from entering waterways entirely. He also highlighted the importance of ongoing funding for water infrastructure, calling it critical to agriculture's future.

He provided updates on the University of Idaho dairy project, saying construction was nearing completion and expected to scale up to thousands of cattle over time. He acknowledged that his committee had not yet discussed budget cuts affecting inspection stations.

ADJOURNED:

There being no further business before the Committee, **Co-Chairman Grow** adjourned the meeting at **9:05 a.m.**

Senator Grow
Chair

Linsy Heiner
Secretary