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"Ours was the first revolution in the history of mankind that truly reversed the course of government, and with three little words: 'We the People.' 'We the People' tell the government what to do; it doesn't tell us. 'We the People' are the driver; the government is the car. And we decide where it should go, and by what route, and how fast. Almost all the world's constitutions are documents in which governments tell the people what their privileges are. Our Constitution is a document in which 'We the People' tell the government what it is allowed to do. 'We the People' are free. This belief has been the underlying basis for everything I've tried to do these past 8 years."

President Ronald Reagan

Farm Bureau Leaders Approve Legislative Priorities

The Idaho Farm Bureau State Board of Directors has approved priority issues the organization will focus on during the upcoming Idaho Legislative session. These priorities fall within the Idaho Farm Bureau's four core areas of emphasis which are: Agriculture, Natural Resources, Private Property, and Taxes.

The legislative priorities for 2017 include: 1.) Securing approval of DEQ's proposed crop residue burning rules and companion legislation allowing the current rules to be used through the 2017 crop year. 2.) Opposing taxation of dyed diesel and any proposed enforcement actions that are unreasonable or burdensome. 3.) Ensuring regulations must meet the same rigorous vetting and approval process as laws before they become effective. 4.) Securing adequate

funding to enhance hours of operation for invasive species check stations. 5.) Requiring legislative approval for any new in-stream flows and changes to the state water plan. 6.) Ensuring no net loss of the remaining 30% of Idaho which is privately owned. 7.) Codifying the 2007 Idaho Supreme Court Joyce Livestock decision which held that federal agencies cannot hold stock-water rights unless they own stock and put the water to beneficial use.

The Idaho Farm Bureau Governmental Affairs Team will be working closely with legislators and members to implement these and other Idaho Farm Bureau policy positions. We encourage members to communicate directly with your legislators and explain why they should support these efforts.

ISDA Briefing Breakfast

Food Producer-sponsored Idaho State Department of Agriculture legislative briefing breakfast was January 12. ISDA staff updated the Senate and House Agricultural Affairs Committees, industry leaders and others about ISDA issues and rules which will come before the legislature. Total attendance was approximately 75, of which 41 were legislators.

This year, ISDA talked about Food Safety Modernization Act implementation, the Animal Health Lab and brucellosis testing, export markets, the Idaho Preferred program, Pale Cyst Nematode, methyl bromide testing and the ISDA budget.

Following the breakfast, Farm Bureau, Cattle Association and United Dairymen of Idaho lobbyists met with ISDA staff to discuss ISDA proposed rules. This meeting had been postponed by weather from the prior week.



Economic Outlook and Revenue Assessment Committee

On Thursday, January 5, prior to the beginning of the legislative session, the Joint Economic Outlook and Revenue Assessment Committee met for a full day of hearings and presentations regarding the state's economy. The committee will use this information to project how much tax revenue will be available for the next year's budget, while also helping legislators gauge the overall economic situation in the state.

Idaho's population continues to grow, but at a slightly slower rate than the two previous decades reported presenters at the hearing. The state's chief economist, Derek Santos, stated that he anticipates moderate growth for Idaho's economy for the next couple of years, with several key economic indicators suggest that the economy is strengthening. Megan Ronk, director of the Idaho Department of Commerce, said that she is very optimistic on business growth throughout the state.

Agriculture production and processing remain as Idaho's leading industry. Dr. Garth Taylor from the College of Agriculture at the University of Idaho gave an overview of the agriculture industry throughout the state and highlighted Idaho's agribusiness as having the largest percentage of direct and indirect sales for Idaho's economy. More than any other industry in the state.

Of the fifty states, Idaho has the fourth largest agriculture economy as a contributor to state GDP and is third in the nation for net farm income. As a measure of net farm income and cash receipts, Idaho is the West's third largest agriculture state, only behind California and Washington. Dr. Taylor explained that one of every five dollars in sales is directly or indirectly created by Idaho's agribusiness.

Although many of these statistics are impressive, the state's agriculture

economy has struggled throughout the past years. Dr. Taylor explained that poor commodity prices, a strong U.S. dollar, low exports and record yields were some of the leading factors to a difficult 2016 year. Last year, cash farm receipts dropped nearly 4% from 2015 levels, and Idaho agriculture exports dropped 40% over the past two years. Net farm income remains volatile in the industry, with forecasts over 10% lower than 2015.

Despite these struggles, Idaho's agriculture is still out-performing the overall U.S. agriculture industry in adjusted cash receipts since 1980. Dr. Taylor explained that the farming sector will always be a stabilizing influence on the state's economy due to the fact that producers will continue to purchase their inputs for next year's crop. Livestock will still need to be fed, seeds will still be sown, and Idaho's agriculture will continue as Idaho's strong economic base.

Medicaid Expansion Dies as Repeal of ACA Gains Momentum

This week, Dean Cameron, Director of the Idaho Department of Insurance, shared some thoughts about healthcare issues at a meeting of the Idaho Association of Commerce and Industry. His comments were candid and pointed. He stated that Idaho was well positioned if the Trump Administration and Congress follow through on their promise to repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Unlike many other states, Idaho has not changed our statutes substantially to conform with the ACA, and we have a solid foundation of pre-ACA legislation that will serve our state well after repeal. He expects repeal to happen within the next 12-18 months so that Congress can run for re-election on this issue. He also believes that the Senate can accomplish a repeal without a 60 vote majority through the reconciliation process.

He noted that the healthcare

insurance market in Idaho will not be horrible post-ACA as some are predicting. Idaho had put many reforms in place prior to the ACA that were working well and will be a benefit to Idahoans in a post-ACA market. Director Cameron also reminded attendees that Idaho enjoys a very robust insurance carrier marketplace with six carriers in the market and no counties with fewer than three options. Nationally, one-third of counties have only one carrier.

House Speaker Paul Ryan is proposing to give a health insurance premium tax credit to all Americans. Director Cameron thought this would be a good start in replacing the ACA and would also benefit many Idahoans in the so-called "gap" population.

Bottom line, Director Cameron told IACI that Idaho is well positioned and does not need to do anything if the

ACA is repealed. He did say that we need more competition in our health-care provider community, which would assist in bringing down pricing and increasing the quality of care. It was good to hear someone so knowledgeable about the health-care insurance industry reassuring business leaders from around the state that repeal of the ACA would not be a catastrophe, and that there is no need for the legislature to jump into any actions which may not be necessary or could potentially be counter-productive. Due to this momentum for repealing the ACA in Congress, the discussions about Medicaid expansion in Idaho have all but evaporated, which is right in line with IFBF policy opposing Medicaid expansion.

New Legislators Are Not All New

Twenty-one individuals won election to new or different seats in the Idaho Legislature in 2016. Of these, 16 are true Freshmen with no legislative experience; one served a prior term in the House; three were appointed to the legislature to complete the term for another legislator; and another was a sitting representative who ran for, and won, an open senate seat. While reading this, please keep in mind that often the primary election is the election and determines who will ultimately hold the legislative seat.

Let's start with the folks with legislative experience. Senators Kelly Anthon (R-Burley, Dist. 27), Mark Harris (R-Soda Springs, Dist. 32) and Maryanne Jordan (D-Boise, Dist. 17) were all appointed to fill seats vacated by gubernatorial appointments and stood for legislative election the first time in 2016. Rep. Thyra Stevenson (R-Lewiston, Dist. 6) regained the House seat she held during 2012-14 after Rep. Dan Rudolph (D-Lewiston) retired from the legislature. Sen. Mark Nye (D-Pocatello, Dist. 29) was a sitting representative and ran for the open senate seat created by Sen. Roy Lacey's (D-Pocatello) retirement. (Sen. Lacey has obviously violated his legislative parole. He is back this week serving in the House as Rep. Elaine Smith's (D-Pocatello, Dist. 29) substitute. Sen. Lacey also served in the House for many years.)

The three Freshman Senators include Jeff Agenbroad (R-Nampa, Dist. 13) who will serve on the Finance, Health & Welfare and Judiciary and Rules committees. Sen Agenbroad was elected to the open seat created by Sen. Curt McKenzie's retirement to run for the Idaho Supreme Court. Sen. Carl Crabtree (R-Grangeville, Dist. 7) defeated Sen. Sheryl Nuxoll (R-Cottonwood) in the primary election and will serve on the Education and

Finance committees. Sen. Dan Foreman (R-Moscow, Dist. 5) defeated the long-time incumbent, Sen. Dan Schmidt (D-Moscow) in the general election and will serve on the Agriculture, Health & Welfare and Judiciary and Rules committees.

There are 13 House Freshmen. Rep. Paul Amador R-Cd'A, Dist. 4) defeated incumbent Kathy Sims (R-Cd'A) in the 2016 primary election and will serve on the Agriculture, Education and Judiciary, Rules and Administration committees. Rep. Randy Armstrong (R-Inkom, Dist. 28) will serve on the Agriculture, Business, and State Affairs committees and won the open seat created by the retirement of House Ag Chairman, Ken Andrus (R-Lava Hot Springs). Incumbent Rep. Pete Nielsen (R-Mtn. Home) lost the primary election to Rep. Megan Blanksma (R-Hammett, Dist. 23). Rep. Blanksma will serve on the Health & Welfare, Local Government and Resources and Conservation committees. Rep. Gayann DeMordaunt (R-Eagle, Dist. 14) ran for and won, the open seat created by the retirement of her husband and House Education Committee Chairman, Rep. Reed DeMordaunt's (R-Eagle). She will serve on the Business, Education, and Transportation & Defense committees. Rep. Priscilla Giddings (R-White Bird, Dist. 7) will serve on the Local Government, Resources & Conservation, and State Affairs committees. She defeated Rep. Shannon McMillan (R-Silverton) in the 2016 primary election.

Rep. Karey Hanks (R-St. Anthony, Dist. 35) defeated Rep. Paul Romrell (R-St. Anthony) in the primary election and will serve on the Agriculture, Health & Welfare and Judiciary, Rules & Administration committees. Rep. John Rusche (D-Lewiston), House Minority

Leader, was beaten in the general election by Rep. Mike Kingsley (R-Lewiston, Dist. 6). Rep. Kingsley will serve on the Commerce & Human Resources, Health & Welfare, and Local Government committees. Rep. Dustin Manwaring (R-Pocatello, Dist. 29) will serve on the Business, Local Government and State Affairs committees and won the open House created by Sen. Mark Nye's (D-Pocatello) decision to retire from the House and run for the open seat created by Sen. Roy Lacey's (R-Pocatello) retirement.

Rep. Dorothy Moon (R-Stanley, Dist. 8) defeated incumbent Rep. Merrill Beyeler (R-Leadore) in the election and will serve on the Commerce & Human Resources, Education and Environment, Energy & Technology committees. Rep. Scott Syme (R-Caldwell, Dist. 11) won the open seat created by the retirement of Rep. Gayle Batt (R-Wilder) and will serve on the Commerce & Human Resources, Education, and Transportation & Defense committees. Rep. Donna Pence's (D-Gooding) retirement created an open seat in District 26 which was won by Rep. Sally Toone (D-Gooding). Rep. Toone will serve on the Agriculture, Business and Education committees.

Rep. Christy Zito (R-Hammett, Dist. 23) defeated former Judiciary, Rules & Administration Chairman, Rep. Rich Wills (R-Glenns Ferry) in the 2016 primary election. Rep. Zito will serve on the Agriculture, Judiciary, Rules & Administration and State Affairs committees. Rep. Bryan Zollinger (R-Idaho Falls, Dist. 33) won the open seat created by the retirement of Rep. Linden Bateman (R-Idaho Falls) and will serve on the Health & Welfare and Judiciary, Rules & Administration, and Local Government committees.

How to Contact Legislators

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