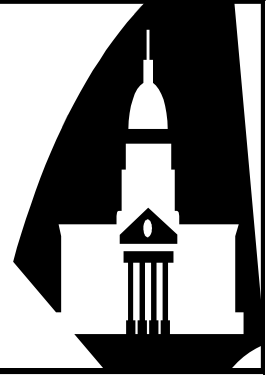


CAPITOL REFLECTIONS

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Legislature adjourns after compromising on road funds

"On the 117th day they rested. Leadership said "Sine Die," and they went forth from the place of struggle to their homes to rejoice and give thanks." Or something like that. Some went fishing. Others got haircuts. Anyway, after reaching an agreement on transportation funding, the 1st Regular Session of the 60th Idaho Legislature ended May 8, one day short of the all-time record of 118 days.

This legislative epoch was comprised of a session-long disagreement between the House of Representatives, Governor's Office and Senate over transportation infrastructure funding. In the 2009 State of the State Address, Governor Otter requested \$174 million in new revenue for maintenance and preservation of Idaho's transportation infrastructure. His plan was based primarily on fuel tax and vehicle registration fee increases, plus four other components.

During the session, the House voted six times on fuel tax increases and each was defeated. House members cited the economy and their constituents' opposition to a tax increase as the reason for their votes. Vehicle registration fee increases were even more unpopular. The Governor and Senate continued to support a fuel tax increase as a primary means to raise new revenue.

On April 20, Governor Otter vetoed 10 bills, 8 of which were appropriations. On April 21, the House voted down a 6 cent fuel tax increase and the Governor answered by vetoing 25 more bills and said he would keep legislators in town until they responded with \$75 million in new revenue for highways.

The House of Representative adjourned Sine Die on April 29 and members left town. The Senate continued to meet. The House was called back to Boise on May 4 because the Senate had not concurred with the House adjournment, as required by the Idaho Constitution.

Throughout the session, more than 30 bills were introduced and printed to address various means of

raising transportation revenue.

Since April 28, intense negotiations took place between the House, Senate and Governor's Office. Late in the week of May 4 an approximately \$54 million compromise was reached, but it did not include a fuel tax increase. About half of the plan is a shift in funding sources and will be in full effect in FY 2011.

The session-ending agreement is contained in five bills:

1. House Bill 338aa raises \$16.4 million by removing the ethanol and biodiesel fuel tax exemption effective July 1, 2009.
2. House Bill 334 increases new revenue by \$13.1 million by increasing Division of Motor Vehicle fees for driver's licenses, titles and other documents beginning January 1, 2010. Vehicle registration fees are not affected by the bill.
3. Starting July 1, 2010, House Bill 376 shifts Idaho State Police (ISP) funding away from fuel tax and registration fees, and an "Idaho Law Enforcement Fund" will be established in the state treasury. The bill also removes the 3% distribution from the gas tax received by the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation. The bill also sets up a legislative task force to look at long-term funding sources to replace the reduced distributions to ISP and Parks and Rec.
4. House Bill 225 raises an estimated \$2 million to \$5 million. This bill allows out-of-state commercial truck trailers to pay a one-time registration in Idaho starting July 1. This is a lifetime registration valid throughout the United States.
5. Senate Bill 1130 limits truck trip permits to three, after which a full annual registration will be required. The bill is expected to raise \$1 million.

This compromise falls far short of the \$70 million to \$80 million in new revenue Governor Otter says is needed each year for highway infrastructure maintenance and preservation. This discussion is not over and will be a topic in the Idaho Legislature for the next several years.

The heavens and earth were created in six days. Appears transportation infrastructure funding is a lot tougher job. Sine Die. *"This is the day the Lord hath made. Rejoice and be glad in it."*

New bill on election consolidation passes in final days

One of the bills passed by the Legislature at the end of Idaho's second longest session ever was a significant measure that consolidates election dates in the state.

House Bill 372, the second election consolidation measure introduced during the session, was overwhelmingly approved and sent to the governor for his signature. The Senate approved H 372 by a vote of 27-8. The House approved the final version of the bill after some minor Senate amendments by a vote of 48-16.

The bill enhances predictability in elections and voter participation.

Under the bill, elections are limited to four dates: The first Tuesday in November, the third Tuesday in May, the last Tuesday in August and the second Tuesday in March. The dates in August and March can only be used by school districts for supplemental bond or levy elections only. The changes are set to take effect in 2011.

Partisan elections will be held on even number years. Statewide ballot questions and judicial races would be on the ballot on even number years, as well as some special district elections. All non-partisan races—city, districts and boards—would be held on odd number years. The majority of special districts plus local levy, local bond and local ballot questions also would be decided by voters on odd years.

Besides consolidating dates, the voter-friendly legisla-

tion also enhances predictability in elections by establishing uniform polling places. Voters will go to traditional precinct polling places for all elections rather than having different polling places for different elections. Some polling places can be consolidated if necessary.

Another major change, under the bill, is giving county clerks the responsibility for handling all elections and paying for election expenses. County clerks will be in charge of notifying voters of elections, publishing voter guides and overseeing polling place workers.

The legislation will change the term of office for some local taxing districts to accommodate the new election dates. Irrigation district elections are not affected by the bill.

House Bill 372 replaced an earlier election-consolidation measure, House Bill 201, which was killed in a Senate committee after passing the House. School officials opposed H 201 because schools would have to pay for holding bond or levy elections on the dates in March and August. H 372 changes that by allocating state funds to cover all election expenses incurred by the counties. The estimated cost is \$4.1 million a year.

Idaho Farm Bureau supports election consolidation and appreciates those who pushed for the passage of H 372, including its legislative sponsors, Rep. Dennis Lake (R-Blackfoot) and Sen. Brent Hill, (R-Rexburg).

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