

REAI Legislative Report, 2021
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January 2021 came in like a lion when the state legislature convened at the Capital building in Boise. Many of the Republican legislators were angry at, and frustrated with, the governor and the actions he took to protect the state during the COVID pandemic, which continues to this day. Much of the early days of the session were taken up with bills that would limit the governor's powers during a pandemic or other emergency, and increase the legislature's involvement in decisions.

Many bills were proposed, and actually passed through committees, that dealt with local government issues, such as changing the names of schools or streets/roads, requiring legislative approval for monuments and outdoor art, and limiting local governments' ability to require new developments to pay their fair share of infrastructure improvements needed. The bill, SB 1108, that would have limited the growth of local governments' budgets in fast growing areas in the state, was narrowly killed in the Senate.

As retired educators we are interested in education issues, and there is much yet to be proposed and/or decided upon. Early childhood funding has been proposed in earlier sessions, but has yet to be achieved. This year the legislators rejected a 3-year, \$6 million federal grant that the State Board of Education could have used to fund early education programs. Last week the bill was rewritten by JFAC in an attempt to appease some of the House conservatives who objected to the initial bill. A parental opt-in bill for sex education has passed the House and is waiting for Senate action. Also passing the House is a bill that would allow school employees with an enhanced-concealed weapons permit to carry a firearm in school without trustees' approval. There are many more education bills that are awaiting action.

Property tax relief was expected by many to be discussed and dealt with this year, but has yet to be seriously considered. It would be helpful if the Circuit Breaker property tax relief could be enhanced. Legislators announced that a bill to increase and index the homeowner's exemption will not get a hearing this session. This will most likely cause substantial property tax increases in our fast-growing state. Other tax breaks that have been proposed, but not given a hearing, included an increase in the child care income tax credit and an earned income tax credit targeted to the lowest earners.

HB 199 would provide tax cuts of up to \$27 million that would overwhelmingly go to Idaho's top earners, and it does not cut residential property taxes.

Several days ago the Idaho House passed legislation that will more than quadruple the amount of the state's general fund that's shifted to road projects each year. Much is needed to keep our highways and bridges in good shape in order to take care of increased traffic throughout our state.

A bill that would have disallowed school elections in August was defeated after intense opposition from school boards across the state.

SB 1110 presents a return of changes to the initiative process to make it harder to pass or repeal a law through the initiative and referendum process. This year's changes would require 6% of voters across Idaho AND 6% of voters from each legislative district.

HB 176 has passed both the House and Senate and signed by the Governor. It allocates a\$175 million in emergency rental assistance from Cares Act II federal funds. This is so important now due to the effects of job losses during the pandemic. Also passed was a bill that requires landlords/property managers to hold security deposits in a separate account, ensuring that the deposit will be there when it's time to refund or access that deposit.

When the legislature reconvenes on April 6 there is a great deal of work that needs to be done. There are many budget bills that remain to be presented and/or acted upon. It has been suggested by some legislators that the legislature might remain in session through late April because the state Constitution requires that budgets must be voted on before adjournment can occur.

My head spins with all of the information that is available to us daily, and I earnestly suggest that all of our members who have computer access go to: Idaho Legislative Session 2021 where there are many ways to access information on specific bills. You can search legislation by bill number, subject, enacted legislation and vetoed legislation. As of this date, March 31, the governor has signed 144 bills and vetoed just one.

I have used newspapers and legislative updates from my representatives and senator for the information I've offered here. I have tried to keep my personal biases out of this content although that's not easy for me to do.

Stay involved and keep informed!!!