

DISTRICT 18 DETAILER

"The Newsletter of Representative Branden J. Durst"

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From the desk...

Dear Reader,

I hope you find this newsletter full of useful information. As your elected state legislator, I am fully committed to working for you. I also hope you are able to provide me your input. By doing so, I will be better prepared to serve you and represent your interests in the Idaho State Legislature. If for any reason you have a question, concern or suggestion please let me know.

NEWS BITES

Rep. Durst co-hosts legislative forum with Sen. Kate Kelly and Rep. Phylis King at Maple Grove Elementary.

Rep. Durst sponsors legislation to let voters permanently receive an absentee ballot.

STIMULUS ON STATE LEGISLATORS MINDS

The actions of Congress are on the minds of many in the Idaho Legislature as budget discussions continue.

With the passage of the Federal Stimulus Package this week in the United States House of Representatives, some state legislators have taken a cautionary outlook on state budget cuts.

The federal package of \$891 billion is slated to be used on everything from education to infrastructure. On Thursday

Idaho Superintendent of

Public Instruction presented his budget proposal to the Joint-Finance and Appropriations Committee (JFAC).

The proposal included sixty-million dollars in cuts to public education. In light of the federal stimulus package, some state lawmakers would like to hold off on budget cuts to education until more is known about how the stimulus package will be spent.

Transportation, another major issue of the 2009 Idaho Legislature, is also a part of the package.

During his State of the State address Governor C.L. "Butch" Otter proposed a series of tax and fee increases to close the gap on transportation funding shortfalls.

As with public education, lawmakers are uncertain if increasing tax burdens on Idahoans is appropriate if the federal package would permit the State of Idaho to make ground in funding transportation.

Representative Branden Durst (D-18A) is one of the lawmakers that is taking a wait-and-see



approach. Durst stated, "In these uncertain times, a little bit of certainty would be beneficial. I am unwilling to proceed with cuts to public education, especially when we don't know if they will even be necessary."

The United States Senate is set to take up debate the package on Monday and should vote

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

In an annual tradition, the House Education Committee met with the presidents of Idaho's public universities.

The budget crunch and its impact upon the universities was a common thread throughout each of the presentations.

On Friday, Boise State University President Bob Kustra stated that growth in enrollment continues. The bad news, he said, was the slowing of the development and implementation of new graduate programs.

He also mentioned that BSU's endowment has, "taken a considerable hit." The on-going solvency of the endowment is uncertain at this time.



HEALTH & WELFARE COMMITTEE

The House Health and Welfare Committee was a very tense as the committee considered budget cuts for psycho-social rehabilitation and developmental disability programs.

The committee heard several hours of public testimony on each issue. The public testimony was presented primarily by both the providers of the services as well the program participants and their families.

Representative Branden Durst (D-18A) questioning focused upon the impact on jobs and the amount of federal matching funds if the cuts were to be approved. The Department of Health and Welfare and the Governor's Office representatives indicated that they were unable to project the potential impact on employment.

Kelly Buckland, Executive Director of the State Independent Living Council (SILC) indicated an additional concern of the potential that cuts would result in increased institutionalization of program recipients.

On Monday the committee voted 15-1 in favor of cutting psycho-social rehabilitation programs, Durst was the sole no vote. Wednesday, the committee voted 9-7 in favor of cutting development disability services. Durst was one of the seven no votes. In response to his votes Durst stated, "I think these cuts will cost jobs, increase costs, and hurt people. The decision was very straightforward."