

# Wendy Jaquet

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## Legislative News - Week One January 12, 2012

The Idaho Legislature opened on Monday, January 9 with Governor Otter's State of the State speech which outlined his priorities for education, job growth, deposits to reserve accounts for future rainy days, employee compensation and tax relief.

There were few provisions for restoring funding lost during the downturn. The revenue projections though modest may be more conservative than what the state expects to see. The job growth initiatives will not put the 65,000 Idahoans who are unemployed back to work in the near future.

Having said the previous, I will give the Governor credit for making education his top priority. It really is the investment with the greatest return for state prosperity. I think you will see some changes in his k-12 education budget recommendations as the House and Senate Committees suggest changes to Superintendent Luna's Students Come First legislation of last year. Since the State Board of Education reduced the number of on line courses to two for the 2014 graduates, there should be funding put back into salaries which were decreased for technology last session.

The higher education recommendations are exciting. He wants the state to partner with the Center of Advanced Energy Studies, CAES and the three research schools and the INL and the Department of Commerce to create new businesses and jobs for Idaho. Similar to an effort in Utah with a modest funding recommendation in comparison, it is a start which can have a good payoff. He is also fully supportive of his new Department of Commerce Director and the initiatives that are being

undertaken and is recommending more funding. And finally, he wants to fund student growth in the schools as well as pick up some of the occupancy costs of new buildings.

He wants to take \$60 million dollars to build up the Public Education Stabilization Fund, the Budget Stabilization Fund and the new Higher Education Stabilization Fund. This seems like more than necessary at this point of recovery.

The Governor has suggested a two pronged approach to employee/teacher salaries. If the state exceeds its revenues by December, 2012 a 1.5% merit increase in the form of a bonus will be forthcoming; the second 1.5% would be rolled out if the state exceeds its projections in the second six months. I'm not sure why the "trigger" can only be effectuated in two six month intervals.

Finally, the Governor, responding to suggestions from majority party legislators, has put a "placeholder" in his budget of \$45 million dollars for "tax relief".

The budget committee began its hearings on Tuesday of this week. I am a member of the Joint Finance and Appropriation Committee, JFAC. I am also a member of the Energy Interim Committee. We approved sending the Energy Plan and a Minority Report to the germane committees on Tuesday. The Judiciary and Rules Committee met today and we will be reviewing rules next week which we will also be doing in the Environment, Energy and Technology Committee.

I came home Sunday from visiting our son and his family in New Jersey with an airplane- caught cold and no car keys. Next week has to be a better week! Please keep in touch. I really appreciate the opportunity to represent you. Please contact me at [wjaquet@house.idaho.gov](mailto:wjaquet@house.idaho.gov).

