



CAPITOL REVIEW

A WEEKLY LEGISLATIVE REPORT

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A Weekly Legislative Report

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BEER & WINE REALLOCATION

The **Idaho Grape & Wine Commission, Idaho Brewers United and Idaho Hop Commission** have worked extremely hard to reach an agreement where all three industries could support H232. The legislation pertains to a law passed in 1998 where the Legislature decided strong beer (beer over 4%) should be considered and taxed the same as wine. Over the years the Idaho Grape & Wine Commission has received 5% of the total wine excise tax that includes strong beer taxes. The beer industry is justified to have the excise tax money from strong beer sales go to an industry organization that promotes the beer industry.

The Idaho Hop Commission is the ideal entity to meet this need. The Idaho Grape & and Wine Commission still needs to have its budget made whole by backfilling the loss of strong beer funding through increasing its portion of the Idaho wine excise tax from the sale of wine produced and sold in Idaho. The majority of the wine excise tax is paid by Idaho wineries.

H232 is a result of 3-years of meetings and negotiations that create a win-win-win situation for all of these industry organizations. The beer industry will be able to better promote its products through the Idaho Hop Commission, and the Idaho Grape & Wine Commission's budget can be made whole and continue to fund the research and development needed to grow a viable grape crop and market Idaho's wine. H232 has passed the House and is awaiting a hearing in the Senate.

HOME STRETCH, MAYBE

Rumors are that **the Idaho Legislature may recess the last week of March and return later in the spring** when federal stimulus money arrives in Idaho. With Congress passing this latest COVID-19 relief bill, the Idaho Legislature could do things a bit differently this year even though the target date to go

home is still March 26. Instead of the traditional adjournment "sine die" in which lawmakers go home and don't return until January or for a special session, they **could effectively recess for a few weeks until the legislature knows the federal guidelines on how to spend stimulus funds.** This would give the legislature an opportunity to have input on how and where the stimulus funding would be spent and address any unfinished business from the current session. Idaho received more than \$1 billion in stimulus funds in 2020. The Legislature did not have a hand in how those funds were spent which has been part of the balance of powers debate throughout this legislative session.

HEMP LEGISLATION UPDATE

H126, dealing with industrial hemp, **passed the Senate Agricultural Affairs Committee this week and will now be voted by the full Senate.** A milestone was accomplished when H126 passed the House Agricultural Affairs Committee last week. H126 had been held in committee while additional information was secured from the Idaho State Police. Several committee members stated that they would vote to support sending the measure to the House floor but would not commit to what their vote would be on H126 once it was up for debate. Chairman of the Agricultural Affairs Committee, Rep. Clark Kauffman, carried the measure on the House Floor and it passed with on a 44 to 26 vote. **Senator Jim Guthrie will carry the measure on the Senate floor.**

MARCH WATER SUPPLY OUTLOOK

The Natural Resources Conservation Service has released the March Water Supply Outlook Report for the 2021 water year. With an early winter dry spell, everyone seemed to be watching closely what February would bring. **For information on specific basins, streams, and reservoirs, please view the full report online at [March Water Supply Outlook Report](#).** Below is a thumbnail sketch of the mostly

positive news from February:

A wet and cold February brought snowpack levels to near or above normal conditions across most of Idaho. Cloudy days and frequent snowfall occurred throughout February over much of Idaho's mountains. In some areas, particularly in northern Idaho, record increases in snow water content for the month were observed! Most of Idaho now holds a normal to above normal snowpack, which bodes well for water supplies.

The March 1, basin-wide snowpack ranges from 67% to 120%. Especially heartening was **the improvement in the Southern Snake River basins' snowpack**. At report time, there is an expectation for near normal irrigation water supply across most basins. "Unlike other areas of the state, below normal precipitation, snowpack, and low reservoir storage in the Wood and Lost basins are cause for concern about ample water supply in those basins," said Erin Whorton, Hydrologist-Water Supply Specialist for NRCS Snow Survey in Idaho. "However, it is possible that a few big storms in the next few months could switch this narrative." Streamflow, snowpack, and precipitation data for each basin can be accessed on the [NRCS Idaho Snow Survey web page](#).

BALLOT INITIATIVES UPDATE

Legislation that seeks to increase voter involvement throughout the state in the voter initiative process **passed out of the House State Affairs Committee and is now eligible to be voted on by the full House**. S1110 would raise the bar to qualify a voter initiative for the ballot by requiring the signatures of 6% of the voters in all the 35 legislative districts. The current standard for an initiative or referendum to make the ballot is the signatures from 6% of the voters in 18 of Idaho's 35 legislative districts. The need for S1110 and a fix of the process stems from the fact that four counties in Idaho (Ada, Canyon, Bonneville and Kootenai) can meet the current standard of signature requirements. An increase in population centers necessitates greater involvement and participation by rural Idaho residents in the ballot initiative process.

For the fourth year in a row, **Idaho has earned the title of fastest-growing state in the country by percentage (2.12%)**. Idaho also made the Census Bureau's top 10 list for percentage increases in 2015 and 2016 prior to becoming the fastest growing in 2017-2020 (US News & World Report). Overall, Idaho's population has grown more than a whopping 12% since 2010 and estimates say Idaho could break 2 million residents by 2025. With these rapidly

changing demographics, it is all the more important to be sure that the entire population have an opportunity to be engaged.

VACCINE FOR SEASONAL AG WORKERS

Please help us to spread the word amongst the agricultural community in the Treasure Valley.

Family Medicine Health Center has scheduled an all-day vaccination campaign on Saturday, March 20 and second dose on Saturday, April 10. They will be scheduled immediately for the second dose.

- **Date:** Saturday March 20 – Second dose only, Saturday, April 10.
- **Time:** All day 8:00 am – 4:30 pm.
- **Site:** Nampa South Family Medicine Health Center – Nampa, ID 83686
- **Location:** 215 E. Hawaii Ave. First Floor

Patients: New patients welcome as long as they are seasonal agricultural workers. Please provide proof of Idaho Residency and pay stubs or letter from employer if paid in cash.

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