



C.L. "BUTCH" OTTER  
GOVERNOR

## OPINION

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# **RESTORING FOCUS ON OUR LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES**

By Governor C.L. "Butch" Otter

The 2014 session of the Idaho Legislature is more than halfway complete. The critical issues have been clearly defined and healthy discussions are progressing.

For me, and I believe for most legislators, the most important issues are education, workforce development, economic opportunity, and responsibly fulfilling the other proper roles of government within the people's means. The work of addressing those issues can be bruising, but it is all the more necessary for its difficulty.

I appreciate the value of our public process and the importance of free and open debate. I also understand the passion behind other, equally legitimate policy issues. But as important as those issues are, they must not push aside our central priorities.

Our focus must remain on advancing practical, measured and sustainable investment in the recommendations of my public schools task force, advancing K-through-Career goals for workforce development, professional-technical training and higher education, and ensuring that Idaho remains a safe harbor of fiscal responsibility in a sea of government deficits and debt.

Other issues do indeed reflect pressing public concerns. Yet I know that our legislators and the people they represent remain focused forward on how we can make Idaho an even better place to live, work and raise a family, how we can better prepare our children and grandchildren for an increasingly competitive global economy, and how we can better serve Idaho taxpayers.

It is encouraging to see significant progress being made on establishing regional behavioral health crisis centers, on improving our management of precious water resources, and on addressing the revolving door to our prisons with more community-based resources and more effective probation and parole tools.

Likewise, it is apparent to me that legislators understand and share my commitment to being responsible stewards of our public resources. They are rightly demanding transparency and accountability from our State government, and they are effectively breaking down artificial barriers between such central issues as public assistance, mental health and public safety.

I believe that truly transformative change – change in the hearts and minds not only of those engaged in the arena of public policy but also those affected by it – comes with time, understanding, and sustained effort. It is a marathon, not a dash, and it requires of us an extra measure of patience and goodwill.

What I saw in the first month and a half of this year's Idaho Legislature was a process that works – certainly not as quickly or completely as some would like, but in a way that seeks to safeguard our future while respecting our past and who we are now.

We probably won't see the words added, Medicaid expanded or the minimum wage increased in 2014. But the fact that we're having those discussions, debates and demonstrations says a lot about the health and vitality of our republic. The kind of grassroots involvement and deep-seated feelings about such public policy issues that we see each winter bears witness to the value of our process.

It is my sincere hope that for the balance of this year's legislative session we will find the political will to act with purpose on our shared priorities while finding within ourselves the peace that comes with confidence that – despite the high-profile debates and occasionally disappointing immediate outcomes – our process and our people are keeping us on the right path.