



C.L. "BUTCH" OTTER  
GOVERNOR

## NEWS RELEASE

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### GOVERNOR OTTER HIGHLIGHTS SUCCESSES OF 2015 IDAHO LEGISLATURE

(BOISE) – While some unanticipated challenges left it with a grade of “Incomplete,” Governor C.L. “Butch” Otter said today that the 2015 session of the Idaho Legislature should be remembered for achieving historic improvements for Idaho schools and starting to address Idaho’s transportation needs.

“We continued making sustainable, responsible investments in our public schools and in the educators on whom our children rely. We broke through years of inertia and created a framework for meeting our long-term transportation revenue requirements. And we passed a balanced budget that reflects our commitment to keeping government’s growth below the growth of our economy,” Governor Otter said. “Yes, there’s some unfinished business and a little disappointment, but mostly what I see is a lot of real, tangible and lasting progress for the citizens of Idaho.”

Successes identified by the Governor from the 2015 legislative session included:

- **Enacting a “Career Ladder” plan for improving public schoolteacher pay**, allocating \$33.5 million for the first year of a five-year plan that includes establishing clear expectations and rewarding excellence in the classroom. The new money is in addition to the annual appropriation of \$16 million for educator leadership premiums implemented last year.
- **Restoring \$24.8 million in discretionary operational funding** to public schools as part of a five-year plan approved in 2014 to restore that funding to fiscal 2009 levels. The new money is in addition to \$38.6 million appropriated last year, leaving \$30.7 million more to reach FY 2009 levels.
- **Providing \$9.4 million for teacher professional development**, \$5 million for classroom technology, \$5.4 million for such “Advanced Opportunities” as dual credit programs, advanced placement exams and professional-technical programs; \$2 million for statewide Wi-Fi services to all Idaho public high schools, and funding to achieve other recommendations from the Governor’s Task Force on Improving Education.
- **Creating a STEM Action Center in the Office of the Governor** to improve the focus throughout Idaho’s education system on Science, Technology, Engineering and Math.
- Restoring \$8.4 million that was cut during the Great Recession from K-12 facilities funding and **Safe and Drug Free Schools funding**, representing the final installment in a three-year restoration plan.
- Allocating more than \$2 million to Idaho’s four-year college and universities and more than \$1.2 million to community colleges for the **Complete College Idaho** program, aimed at improving the “K-through-Career” education pipeline by helping prepare Idaho’s workforce for higher-skilled, higher-paying jobs.

- Investing over \$1 million to higher education institutions statewide for the **Advanced Manufacturing Initiative** expanding opportunities for professional-technical education.
- Increasing the revenue available for work on a growing backlog of maintenance and improvement on Idaho's highways and bridges. Idaho's 25-cents-per-gallon fuel tax – untouched since 1996 – will increase to 32 cents per gallon on July 1. Along with vehicle registration increases and a “surplus eliminator” plan for transferring half of any General Fund balances at the end of each fiscal year to the Idaho Transportation Department, **House Bill 312 figures to raise about \$95 million a year toward reducing the highway and bridge work backlog** and opens the door to continuing discussion about sustainable, long-term funding.
- Allocating \$1.72 million for a second **Behavioral Health Community Crisis Center**. In December, the first of what Governor Otter hopes will be local crisis centers in each of the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare's seven regions was opened in Idaho Falls. The second center will be located in northern Idaho.
- **Providing \$1.75 million for the Opportunity Fund**, an Idaho Department of Commerce economic development program that provides targeted grants to support expansion of existing Idaho businesses and recruit new companies providing better jobs for Idaho citizens. Opportunity Fund grants are performance based and pay for infrastructure and other public costs related to job creation.
- **Approving deposits totaling almost \$57.7 million to the State's Budget Stabilization Fund and \$21.5 million to the Public Education Stabilization Fund** – “rainy day” accounts for use in the event of a future economic downturn impacting State revenues.
- Funding for ten seats authorized over the previous two legislative sessions for Idaho students to study at the University of Washington medical school as part of the WWAMI (Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, Idaho) compact. The Legislature also provided funding for five additional WWAMI seats, bringing the number of Idaho's first-year WWAMI medical school seats to 35 next fall. **That means Idaho soon will have 140 medical students studying through the WWAMI program – up from 80 just three years ago.**
- Consolidating all Idaho's open government-related laws under a new title in Idaho Code called **“Transparency and Ethics in Government.”** The goal is making it as easy as possible for citizens to follow the workings of State government and to hold public officials accountable.

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