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July 6, 2011

June was a busy month for us, and with the Fourth of July comes hot weather in Lewiston and often a slow political season. Looks to me like things will stay busy.

Redistricting

I have the responsibility of naming one of the members on the Redistricting Commission. By our Idaho Constitution, a commission is impanelled every ten years to redraw the Congressional and Legislative districts to better assure equal representation. There are additional concerns (maintaining county lines, precinct lines, communities of interest, and continuity) but the primary one is putting equal population numbers in each district.

The Commission started June 7, and has 90 days to finish a map. In addition to the commission's own work, any one can draw a map and submit it for consideration. It could even be a partial map. Feel free to try your hand at the Commission web site.

The web tool (Maptitude) is relatively easy to use.

If you only want to see what others have drawn, you can do that too.

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The Commission aims for a preliminary map the end of the month and must be done by September 4.

[ActBlue](#)

Here are links to the [Redistricting Commission website](#) and [mapping tool](#).

Budgeting and Financing

With June done, we will close out FY 2011.

Because of tax revenue above predicted earlier in the year it looks like we will have a sizable surplus of \$50-60 M. But by Federal law, most of the money must be used to support education, and before the session ended we passed an appropriation bill to recognize and direct this "maintenance of effort" funding should it be available. The school districts are likely to need this (and other) additional funding going into next year given the prior reductions in the FY 2012 budget.

Other School Doings

There will be referendums to vote on, but no recall election for Superintendent Luna.

The three votes will take place as part of the November 2012 general election. Until then, the laws passed and signed this year are in place and dictate contract relationships between local school districts and school employees, how teachers are paid, and begin the transition to "on-line" education. Supt. Luna has convened a work group to help with implementation, and kicked it off with a big meeting.

One of the interesting items from that meeting was the report that "blended" classroom-online courses used by some school districts would not count as part of the requirement for computer delivered classes. The implication appears to be that only the for-profit, internet based classes will be acceptable, thereby assuring that local school budget dollars go to out of state for-profit vendors. I hope the State

Board decides otherwise.

Another interesting issue in the education world is the recent report on the ISEE, the data system developed to track students, their performance and administrative data (enrollment, attendance) used for administering school districts and school budgets. This multimillion dollar system was panned by the Idaho Association of School Business Administrators. In a survey of their members, those most intimately involved in using the system rated it very poorly, particularly on support and on the implementation plan. ([Editorial summary here](#))

I am quite concerned that the State does not have the capability to manage contracts and oversee implementation of system changes. (A [similar story](#) with the Medicaid Molina contract).

No small part of our failure, I believe, is the fact that we have cut staffing to the bone, and with salary cuts, furlow, etc, many of the most skilled employees have moved on to other jobs. If we are to have a government that works, we have to be willing to pay for it. And we should demand honesty from our State leaders, they should be willing to tell us when they do not have the resources they need.

Jobs and the Economy

The nation as a whole, and here in Idaho, continues to have trouble creating enough jobs.

While the manufacturing sector has improved some, most big companies are holding onto the cash from improved profits, and smaller companies are hesitant to add employees in what is still an uncertain economy.

Real decreases in the job numbers in the service sector, in education and government services, continue and are likely to be a part of the landscape for a while. Decreases in these sectors have been wired in to the FY 2012 budgets. Hopefully manufacturing and other industries can pick up the slack.

I do not think that the recovery improves, that businesses hire workers, until there is evidence that there are buyers for their goods and services. That

means jobs and paychecks to produce those buyers.

Healthcare

One sector that continues to grow is the health services industry. It is ironic that what some consider a growth industry others consider an unsupportable cost. What you see depends where you sit.

I just finished a two day meeting in Boise on health system reform. Sponsored by the Governor's office, it was an update on his Health Care Council, with a review of changes in the health care environment since 2007. There is a tremendous amount of change happening in the health care and health insurance area.

Most of this is not being driven by the Affordable Care Act (ACA, federal health reform) although some is due to that legislation. Most is being driven by the employers, health plans and healthcare providers who recognize that our cost in the US is too high and the results are of insufficient quality to justify the cost difference.

Some of the biggest change is that there is almost unanimous agreement among those present on what needs to change. The vision is one of accessibility and affordability built on a model of continuous relationships between patients and providers of care. That implies paying differently for care, integrating virtually and financially, use of data and technology, and shared responsibility between the patient, the provider and the "system" for cost and quality results.

Much of what the industry says they need to move forward is quite consistent with the ACA. But there is a lot of impatience in waiting for the political discussion and legal challenges to the law to settle down. Regardless of the outcome in the courts, hospitals, docs, health plans, and even the State of Idaho (the largest Idaho purchaser of healthcare) are intent on making things work better and more efficiently.

Summer Travels

So far this summer Kay and I have had two overseas trips. We had never been to Asia, and in May we visited Turkey and in June we went to

Taiwan. Turkey was part of a cultural exchange program (fascinating for a politician as it was a two weeks before their legislative elections) and allowed us to spend a great deal of time visiting with citizens in their homes.

The Taiwan trip was a part of a governmental and trade mission. The Lt. Governor (Brad Little) and the Senate President ProTem (Brent Hill) and three Montana legislative leaders (and our spouses) went as well. I was the token Democrat.

Taiwan is one of the largest trading partners (the largest on a per capita basis) of Idaho. It was a more formal tour, but also interesting from a learning perspective. And good for keeping a relationship going with a large consumer of Idaho products produced by Idaho workers. We were even able to make some progress on barriers to more sales.

This is a real change from last summer. Kay's treatments kept us close to home in 2010. But aside from trips to Boise and other Idaho venues, I think I am done traveling for a while.

So if there is an issue to discuss or a legislative solution to a problem, let me know so we can begin work. It is easier now than if we wait until the session.

Information and Contact Information

It is not always easy to know what is up in Boise when the Legislature is not in session, I try to keep track of things through the papers, blogs (Betsy Russell's [Eye on Boise](#), Bill Spence (of the Tribune) [Political Theatre](#)), or just keeping my ear to the political ground.

Thanks again for the honor you have shown in me by allowing me to serve as your representative. You can call and leave a message at home ([208-743-1339](tel:208-743-1339)) or [email me](#) and I will get back to you.

It continues to be my honor to serve as your representative.

John

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