**2012 Idaho legislature**

Week in Review

February 3rd, 2012

As the 2012 session takes stride, public health issues are slow to hit the Senate and House floors. Many bills remain in the first and second readings. To follow up on last week’s edition, the Re-Apportionment Commission unanimously approved a new map which abides by the Supreme Court’s ruling to reduce county division. A copy of the map is available [HERE](http://www.legislature.idaho.gov/redistricting/PlanHtml/L93.pdf). The map splits only seven counties, but at least 2 districts are as large as some states in the USA.

Of interest to the public health community, the Department of Education released its bi-annual Idaho Youth Risk Behavior survey. The results determine that although acts of violence have declined 3% to 26%, students contemplating suicide have jumped 14.2% totaling 15%. Furthermore, the [2012 Annual Report of the American Association of Suicidology](http://www.isu.edu/irh/projects/ysp/downloads/2009NationalData-AAS.pdf) listed Idaho as having the 4th highest suicide rates in the nation. Idaho remains one of the only states that, due to lack of funding, does not have a suicide hotline. A coalition of individuals, professionals and organizations including the [Speedy Foundation](http://thespeedyfoundation.org/) and [United Way of Treasure](http://unitedwaytv.org/) Valley are working to raise start-up and program funding to support a suicide hotline in Idaho.

On Friday, the Joint Committee on Appropriations and Finance heard public testimony. Members of the public from across the state voiced their ideas and grievances with the budgeting process. Overwhelmingly, the public presented heartfelt testimony asking for the committee to revisit last year’s Medicaid budget cuts in H260; particularly the requirement to choose between disability coverage and mental illness coverage. The suicide hotline issue was also of concern to individuals.

**Health Insurance Exchange**

A coalition of individuals, businesses and associations continues to work with the Department of Insurance, the Department of Health and Welfare, the Governor and the Legislature on legislation to create a state –based [health insurance exchange](http://healthexchange.idaho.gov).). They have not introduced a bill yet. Rep Sue Chew has introduced legislation [H433](http://legislature.idaho.gov/legislation/2012/H0433.pdf) that is not part of this coalition’s efforts. The legislation has been referred to the House Health and Welfare Committee.

The House Health and Welfare Committee heard presentations from two organizations Thursday afternoon. The first was from Christie Herrera, from the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) which is a nonpartisan organization of state legislators which favors federalism and conservative public policy solutions. Herrera explained her organization’s position against creating a state health insurance exchange, noting a lack of federal flexibility, changing deadlines and timetables as well as unclear funding sources after state exchanges is expected to be financially self-sufficient. The committee had questions about financing an exchange, the benefit package design options, and where the states would have any decision making.

Secondly, John R Graham of the Pacific Research Institute, a non-profit, free market think tank expressed his organizations concerns about a state health insurance exchange. He referred to the “inconsistent message” that the Governor is sending about the constitutionality of PPACA, and his research on the Utah’s private market exchange and the changes it will have to make to comply with Federal exchange regulation. He told the committee that he thought the legislature could wait to take action until the Supreme Court makes it decision.

**Tobacco Tax**

Tobacco taxes have been a historically contentious issue in Idaho and the 2012 session is no exception. A coalition of 25 health-related organizations, spearheaded by the American Cancer Society, has revamped efforts this year to pass a $1.25 tax increase on tobacco products. The same tax was not enacted last year. While the American Cancer society spent $15,516 on lobbying efforts last year, Altria Client Services, a parent company to tobacco giant Philip Morris spent $110,467.

Currently, Idaho has one of the lowest tobacco taxes in the country at 57 cents per pack. The proposed increase would mean a total tax of $1.82 per pack. Annually this could raise $50 million for the state.

Two weeks ago, the coalition publicly released a comprehensive study [“The Economic Impact of State Cigarette Taxes and Smoke-free Air Policies on Convenience Stores](http://www.impacteen.org/generalarea_PDFs/ITresearch40_Huang_with_exec_sum.pdf)” from a university sponsored organization, ImpacTeen. The study disproves the claim that a tobacco tax hurts convenience stores. The report actually establishes a positive correlation between increasing the tobacco tax and increasing convenience stores.

The coalition supporting the tobacco tax increase has been busy this session in the Capital building. The coalition hit the halls in a televised press event this Monday. Supporters passed out postcards that inform the public and their legislators that regardless if you smoke, individuals pay $539 per year in increased health insurance premiums and higher Medicaid costs.

**Legislation of Interest**

To view summaries and updates of additional legislation IPHA is following throughout the 2012 session, click [HERE](file:///C:\Users\mhenbest\Documents\Legislatin%20Update%20Final\Legislation%20of%20Interest.docx). To be routed to a full text version of each bill, click on the bill’s title in blue. The Idaho Legislature home page also offers a free bill tracking service that provides email alerts regarding any status changes. To sign up, click [HERE](http://legislature.idaho.gov/MyBillTracker/Login_input.do;jsessionid=63C9C8FE6EDC71BDCB79A2EB23AD4D2D)