



IDAHO FREEDOM  
FOUNDATION

# 2024 IDAHO REPORT ON GOVERNMENT WASTE



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A very special thank you to all the Idahoans across the Gem State who support Idaho Freedom Foundation's mission of liberty and fiscal responsibility.





# GOVERNMENT PORK: IDAHO'S OTHER WASTE MEAT

I'm old enough to remember the classic accounts of government waste made infamous in the 1970s and 80s: the \$200 government hammer, the \$640 toilet seat on military aircraft, and the \$37 screw that was "unlosable."

Sadly, as long as we have a government, we will have government waste. It does people good, though, to be reminded how their tax dollars are often frittered away on needless expenses. Hopefully, these stories reinforce what should be instinct for a free people: a healthy distrust of the government process and the propensity of government profligates to spend and forget.

That's why I'm both pleased and pained to re-introduce the Idaho Freedom Foundation's 2024 Idaho Report on Government Waste, aka the "Pork Report." Years ago, the IFF published its first Pork Report and did another in 2019, but it's time we took another look at waste in the Idaho government.

In this 2024 edition, you will find over 60 examples of government waste emanating from Boise and all around the state. These examples represent your hard-earned tax dollars being frittered away, all because government can't control its spending and has poor incentives for preventing waste, fraud, and abuse.

Sadly, all these examples and costs are just the tip of the iceberg in Idaho government waste. We spent months poring over budgets and collecting first-hand accounts from Idaho citizens. Even so, we can't capture everything going on. So, allow this to serve as a stark reminder that we should be vigilant and skeptical of any and all government programs promising some sort of "return on investment" of your hard-earned tax dollars.

I would normally say, “Enjoy what you read here,” but that doesn’t seem right. Idaho, of all states, should not be increasing its budget by 55% over the last five years as it has done. By eliminating wasteful spending, fraudulent programs, and abuse of government power, we could cut budgets, save taxpayers’ dollars, and restore a modicum of faith in government. Let this Pork Report be a call to action for you! Hold your government accountable.

One more thing, you may be wondering how a screw can be “unlosable.” Here’s how. If you saw a 2-cent screw roll off your work table, you just grab another. But, as the manufacturer of the \$37 screw says, if you drop their screw, you would move heaven and earth until you found it. Yup, unlosable.

This year’s Pork Report and all the amazing research and legislative work IFF does are only possible with the support and trust of our partners. You can assist our efforts by joining our IFF membership and being informed of what is happening in Idaho’s government on a daily basis.

In liberty, and with firm reliance on our Creator,



Ronald Nate, PhD  
President, Idaho Freedom Foundation



# THE WORST OF THE WASTE



## “GO WOKE, GO BROKE” IS NOT AN INSTRUCTION, BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY

Go woke, go broke. Right, Boise State University?

More than four years ago, the woke leaders of Boise State University decided to wage war on Big City Coffee owner Sarah Fendley because of her support for law enforcement officials. In the wake of the George Floyd fiasco, overly sensitive administrators hastily called Fendley into their office in October of 2020 to tell her, in short, they weren't thrilled with her support of law enforcement at her downtown Boise location. While the school ardently denies that they forced Fendley to close her satellite location on the Boise State campus, the small business owners say they did. In response, Fendley filed suit, seeking **\$10 million** in damages fees.

This past fall, a jury of Ada County residents sided unanimously with Fendley, awarding her **\$4 million** in damages and compensation. Boise State, for its part, has spent more than **\$1 million** on outside legal help defending itself in the case. But that's not the full tally. Boise State

University told Idaho Freedom Foundation writers this year that they don't know the full cost of the defense because the school hasn't tracked hours spent on the case by in-house counsel. Taxpayers may never know the total bill for the legal defense efforts.

Sadly, this saga isn't over. After the ruling, Boise State University pledged to appeal, meaning the school could incur millions more in legal fees.

Unfortunately for taxpayers and tuition-paying students, Boise State University officials have yet to realize the “go woke, go broke” is a societal criticism, not an instruction.

## FUNDING THE PRIDE AGENDA

People often underestimate the negative effects of the government subsidizing something that should be curated by the free market, like culture. What you get is an inorganic artistic expression that fails to reflect the values and culture of the people who live where it is on display. Funding for LGBTQ Pride events in Idaho is one example of this.

A regular expression of the woke counterculture seeking to take root in Idaho is the Boise Pride Festival. Several government entities support the event to demonstrate their false inclusiveness. The City of Boise, for one, spends **\$15,000** annually to be a sponsor for the event. The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare was also a key sponsor for the event. They used their smoking cessation program, Project Filter, to funnel **\$20,000** to the Boise Pride Festival each year. This was before the Legislature ultimately banned the practice.

The Idaho Commission on the Arts is also guilty of subsidizing wokeness in places where it wouldn't have organically sprung up. The agency was a key sponsor for the first Bonners Ferry Pride Festival, put on by the North Idaho Pride Alliance. The Arts Commission, an agency that shouldn't exist in the first place, receives a total budget of **\$2.2 million** each year.

## GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Love it or hate it, government is ubiquitous and unavoidable, so why does it spend so much money advertising itself? The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare is one of the worst offenders, spending more than **\$15 million** on advertising over the last two years. This includes significant expenditures advertising against substance abuse — as if anyone has ever decided not to use illegal drugs because of a billboard.

IDHW isn't the only agency wasting taxpayer dollars on such endeavors, of course. The Idaho State Police spent **more than half a million dollars** over the past two years promoting "fentanyl awareness." Isn't everyone aware of fentanyl at this point?

Speaking of "awareness," public colleges and universities also spend millions of dollars advertising themselves on radio, billboards, Google, Facebook, and even TikTok! Is this really a wise use of funds?

This problem exists throughout government, unfortunately. Among other things, the Idaho Department of Education spent thousands of dollars on radio and TV ads to promote its summer food service program. How do you make a problematic welfare program worse? By spending money to advertise it and encourage more people to participate.

Some departments are hesitant to reveal how much they spend on advertising. When we requested information about advertising expenses incurred by the Idaho Department of Agriculture, they asked for more than \$400 to cover "12 hours of labor" to process "approximately 1,400 pages" of information. How much advertising do they do?

## INTERIM COMMITTEES AND TASK FORCES

Idaho has a growing list of interim committees and task forces, which bring to mind Ronald Reagan's observation that government bureaus are "the nearest thing to eternal life we'll ever see on this earth." During the 2024 Legislative Session, the Legislature created another one — the Medicaid Legislative Review Panel. While the costs for these committees and task forces vary, they require, at minimum, funding to cover per diem, mileage, and lodging for their members.

## COVID FUNDING FOR A \$1 MILLION MAIL SORTER?

This year, the Legislature appropriated **\$1,054,200** to the Department of Administration for them to purchase a new mail sorter.<sup>1</sup> These funds came from federal COVID-19 relief funding through the American Rescue Plan Act. These funds were supposed to be used to address funding shortfalls imposed by pandemic policies.

When the Legislature agreed to accept this funding in 2021, they highlighted that this money was borrowed from our grandchildren and should be used to benefit them. Spending the money on million-dollar mail sorters hardly achieves this requirement.



## AGENCIES WANT VERY NICE THINGS

Replacement items are a regular expense in government, since things wear out and need to be upgraded. This, however, is also a place where upgrades can go a bit too far and become a source of unseen waste.

The Department of Finance wanted to replace just 25 laptops in the 2025 fiscal year at an egregious cost of **\$55,000** total!<sup>2</sup> Some digging revealed that the request was for the most expensive models allowed. Doubtless, the department will need some higher-end laptops for their work, but maxing out the budget estimates is one way this department is squeezing taxpayers for more funds they don't really need.

In a similar fashion, the Idaho State Police cost taxpayers **\$200,000** for dispatch consoles.<sup>3</sup> These consoles range between \$15,000 to \$25,000 a piece but they requested the premium price in their budget. Legislators ultimately granted their request, removing any incentives to save costs.

## DEI FOR INTERNET

Buried in the budget for the Idaho Commission for Libraries is the Digital Access for All Idahoans grant program. This program is designed to subsidize “affordable internet” for minority groups.

This project is part of a larger federal initiative created by the Digital Equity Act that will cost **\$25 million** over its lifecycle.<sup>4</sup> These funds originally came from Biden's inflationary Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Idaho currently has about \$2.5 million buried in the budget for this program this year.

Many people consider internet service to be like any other public utility. But they aren't. Internet companies generally own the infrastructure they build. Ironically, subsidizing this private industry stifles innovation and market competition, raising prices in the long run. Fiber technology is already on track to becoming obsolete with the advent of Elon Musk's Starlink. With a healthy free market, there is potential for other, potentially even better, products to enter the market in the coming years. Meanwhile, the government is propping up an inefficient industry that is set to be obsolete in years, not decades.

## IDAHO'S CALIFORNIA-STYLE NEEDLE EXCHANGE PROGRAM

Many Idahoans are surprised to learn that, for years, Idaho had a California-style needle exchange program. This program featured sites where drug

users could exchange their used needles for clean, state-subsidized needles and other drug paraphernalia. Among these other supplies furnished by needle exchanges included “safe smoking” kits that helped teach users how to “safely” smoke their drugs.<sup>5</sup>

In 2023, taxpayers dished out nearly **\$11 million** in federal funds through State Opioid Response Grants. Once the Legislature ended these grants, other funding came through hepatitis and HIV mitigation plans.

These programs were very ineffective, too. In 2022, Idaho’s Syringe and Needle Exchange program even added about 22,600 needles to our communities rather than keeping used needles off the streets like they promised.

Thankfully, the Legislature passed House Bill 617 in 2024, ending this public policy nightmare.<sup>6</sup>

## IDAHO’S LUXURY SPORTS CAR FLEET

In the summer of 2024, the media reported that the Idaho State Police had added nine Ford Mustang Dark Horses to their fleet.<sup>7</sup> A Lieutenant with the department said, “We use it for parades. It’s a full-time patrol vehicle assigned to one of our troopers. It’s a fun car. It’s a pretty car. Obviously, those kinds of vehicles help a lot with public interaction.”

The starting price for a Ford Mustang Dark Horse is just under \$60,000 each, but these police models likely cost quite a bit more.<sup>8</sup> Each new Mustang goes through an outfitting process of up to two weeks which includes installing new high-end radios, lights, equipment, and kick screens. They also go through a series of “strenuous quality assurance checks.”

Even for standard civilian models of this car, Kelley Blue Book estimates the “5-Year Cost to Own” above \$80,000, meaning that these nine “fun” and “pretty” parade cars will easily cost taxpayers more than **\$720,000** over the next five years.

## AMERICA AT 250, CELEBRATING FREEDOM WITH WASTEFULNESS

What better way to celebrate the 250th anniversary of freedom and independence from an overreaching government than to spend millions of taxpayer dollars? This sounds absurd, but last July, the governor signed a proclamation creating a new task force to plan and coordinate a commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, dubbed America250.

Unfortunately, the cost of this commemoration will go well beyond what is required for the task force, with the Idaho Legislature voting to pass HCR31 (2024), which carried a fiscal note estimating **\$1.65 million** in budget requests for America250 in Idaho.

The America250 project is managed by the Idaho Historical Society. This project is designed to provide grants to “enhance Idaho history, literacy, culture, and civic engagement.”<sup>9</sup> This includes a shiny new website, a book, and a program on Idaho Public Television.

When confronted with concerns about how this money could be returned to the taxpayers or better used on real public services, the agency was at a loss. Their justification for pressing on with this funding was that other states are doing the same thing, and the Legislature bought it.

## THE MILITARY DIVISION’S NEVER-ENDING CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

For the 2025 fiscal year, the Legislature appropriated another **\$12 million** in ongoing federal grants to support various construction projects managed by the division.<sup>10</sup> Since well-managed construction projects are supposed to be temporary, creating an ongoing slush fund spends money that may or may not be needed. This causes additional waste and unnecessary government growth as agencies start looking for ways to spend the extra funds.

## THE MARKET MIRAGE OF GOVERNMENT LIQUOR STORES

There is a bit of irony when the government establishes a monopoly for itself and then attempts to run it like any other private business competing in a free market. This is the case with Idaho’s liquor stores.

The Legislature appropriated **\$937,600** over the last five fiscal years — **\$166,300** this year alone — to relocate or remodel liquor stores throughout the state.<sup>11</sup> Though this money generally comes from liquor sales instead of taxes, these are sales the state would not make without owning the market. Since state liquor stores don’t have to compete for sales, it doesn’t make sense for them to renovate stores to attract customers. People who wish to purchase liquor don’t have any alternatives.

The rationale of state ownership of liquor sales is that it promotes temperance. However, state control of liquor sales does not inherently limit the consumption of liquor. There are no limits on the amount of alcohol one can purchase at these stores. Additionally, renovating stores for the purpose of drawing in more customers runs counter to their

mission. The hypocrisy of this state monopoly reveals its true motive: to make money for the government.

## THE IDAHO RURAL PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM (IRP)

The IRP is a program intended to connect the Legislature with information and resources about rural communities in Idaho. For the last 15 years of its existence, the program was self-funded through donations and non-appropriated funds. Nevertheless, the Legislature opted to add one staff member at a cost of **\$116,900** per year to operate the program.<sup>12</sup> It is unnecessary to support a program that serves a function that more appropriately belongs to the private sector.

## THE COST OF EFFICIENCY

Just when taxpayers were finally about to see some relief in spending on the Idaho Industrial Commission's business and technology modernization project, the commission found new things to spend money on. After five years of updates, the department expanded the scope of the project to "create workflows and automate business processes." Not only was this not in the original request, but it will run the taxpayers an additional **\$2,077,500** in costs not originally planned for.<sup>13</sup>

## NEEDLESS GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Some of the most destructive government agencies are the ones that were needless to begin with. There are many such agencies in the Idaho state government. They include the likes of the Commission on Hispanic Affairs, the Idaho Commission on the Arts, the Idaho Honey Commission, Tech Help, Small Business Development Centers, and the Office of Energy and Mineral Resources.

The Hispanic Commission receives an annual appropriation of **\$507,600** to "provide various services to the Hispanic community" and work toward "economic, educational, and social equity."<sup>14</sup> In essence, the commission is a taxpayer-funded diversity lobbyist that doubles to give special treatment to a minority group by virtue of their heritage. This is far from equality under the law.

The woke mob also uses the Arts Commission as a vector for leftist cultural indoctrination. With a budget of **\$2,253,100**, the commission "stimulate[s] and encourage[s] the study and presentation of the arts, and public interest and participation therein, and to encourage and assist

freedom of artistic expression.”<sup>15</sup> These duties are the rightful role of the private sector, not the government. This money overrides public input, driving art and culture for the government’s purposes.

The state of Idaho also has several agencies — with a combined appropriation of **\$1,545,300** — that merely serve to advise small businesses.<sup>16</sup> Tech Help, a subsidiary of the State Board of Education, provides manufacturing consulting services to small businesses throughout the state. Small Business Development Centers operate under the same umbrella, but they provide more general consulting services. Not only do these state agencies facilitate services that should (and are) conducted by the free market, but they discriminate against business owners based on their immutable characteristics like race or gender. In 2023, the Legislature funded a **\$218,900** initiative using federal COVID money to provide grants to minority-owned businesses.

The promotion of Idaho industry is also a role of the private sector the government has somehow assumed. This is the case with the Idaho Honey Commission, an agency with the sole purpose of collecting a tax per industrial beehive in the state and using its **\$22,400** budget to advertise on behalf of the honey industry.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, Idaho spends **\$12,666,500** annually to maintain a government agency that has no statutory authority to exist — the Office of Energy and Mineral Resources.<sup>18</sup> This agency was created by the governor through executive order in 1975 and recently extended by Gov. Brad Little. Its millions go to serve as an advisory role on energy and mineral-related matters. Federal money through the Energy Resiliency Grant program caused the agency’s budget to grow substantially in recent years.

## FUNDING IDAHO’S WORKFORCE THE COMMUNIST WAY

Among the needless agencies in the state is the STEM Action Center to garner interest among children in fields focused on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. The agency costs taxpayers **\$6,184,100** annually to “produce a competitive STEM-ready workforce.”<sup>19</sup> They do this through various educational, marketing, and policy initiatives, but this is outside the proper role of government. Rather, the free market should be in charge of developing the workforce to accommodate its needs.

Some of the initiatives within the STEM Action Center aren’t proving fruitful, either. The Legislature moved **\$40,000** from the agency to the Library Commission to salvage a STEM program that was going to be discontinued. In



other words, the agency and taxpayers could have lived without yet another program to stimulate the workforce.

In the same vein, Idaho centrally plans the workforce and education through the Idaho LAUNCH program. The Idaho Legislature passed House Bill 24 (Freedom Index -6) in 2023 to create the program despite vociferous objections from conservative lawmakers. The program expands government, competes with the private sector, redistributes wealth, rewards some people at the expense of others, and increases government spending. The **\$70,986,100** appropriated to the program through the Workforce Development Council are used to drive students into what the government deems to be “in-demand” careers.<sup>20</sup>

What’s more concerning is that LAUNCH scholarships aren’t supporting Idaho’s brightest but subsidizing underperforming students. The mean GPA among LAUNCH applicants is 2.73—a C+ average.<sup>21</sup> There is no provision in the legislation for the Workforce Development Council to consider GPA when deciding on grant awards. Instead, priority will first be given to those seeking to enter in-demand — read, government-favored — careers, then based on financial need. This process smacks of the free college advocacy that would make socialists like Senator Bernie Sanders proud.

Workforce training is not the responsibility of the government or the taxpayers. Again, it is the role of the private sector to train and retain their workforce. These initiatives subsidize state-favored industries on the backs of the taxpayers.

## DEATH TAKES A TOLL

Lethal injection is Idaho’s preferred method of capital punishment. But it’s not always smooth and easy. Last February, the scheduled execution of an Idaho convicted killer, Thomas Creech, was botched, aborted, and rescheduled. Apparently, there were problems in getting the needle inserted to establish a central line IV for the lethal chemical injection drugs to flow. It’s not pleasant to witness an execution to begin with, let alone one that didn’t work correctly. The state rescheduled the execution and, in the meantime, built an ante-room for inserting an intravenous line before presenting the subject to the witness panel. The room cost **\$313,915** and will, understandably, rarely be used.<sup>22</sup> That’s an expensive room just for the purpose of inserting a needle before witnesses are allowed to see the lethal drugs pumped in.

We often hear how it’s more expensive for the government to exact the death penalty for convicted murderers than it is to merely keep them imprisoned for life. Mainly, it’s because the legal process is so fraught with

lengthy trials, appeals, and last-minute pleas for clemency and stays. It gets expensive, but this new lethal injection preparation room made it even more so.

## DEATH TAKES ANOTHER TOLL

Did we mention the expense and complications around the state implementing the death penalty? Well, it gets worse. In “Death Takes a Toll” above, we detailed the extra costs of building a new facility for lethal injection preparations of the convict to be executed. There are other complications, too. The Idaho Department of Corrections often finds it difficult and onerous to acquire the lethal injection drugs to accomplish the executions.<sup>23</sup> For one thing, pharmaceutical companies are reluctant to make their transactions with the state public. Thus, according to Josh Tewalt, the director of IDOC, transactions are often done in cash and in secret. Sometimes, it is impossible to get the drugs in a timely manner.

Because of these realities, the IDOC asked the Legislature to authorize and fund an alternative execution method “just in case.” The alternative is a firing squad. But executions by firing squad are not simple affairs either. The department requested and obtained funding for a new execution-by-firing-squad facility in the 2023 legislative session for an estimated **\$750,000**.<sup>24</sup> Of course, the cost didn’t stay there. Now, the estimation for the facility was just shy of **\$1,000,000**.<sup>25</sup> Just like death, government spending never takes a holiday.

## THE MINE THAT’S JUST A HOLE IN THE BUDGET

The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has been managing an old mine in North Idaho for some time now. The Bunker Hill cleanup project is a long-term project that is less of a mine and more of a money pit as of late.

The project already received **\$1.5 million** and another **\$13.7 million** in COVID funding from the American Rescue Plan Act in the 2023 fiscal year.<sup>26</sup> Then, the department asked for another **\$1.1 million** in the 2025 fiscal year to mitigate the rising costs of inflation.

Ironically, the ARPA money they took for this project is one of the largest contributors to this same inflation. The \$1.1 million is actually a 40% increase for the project this year, well beyond what would be warranted by the federal government’s inflation problem.

## SUBSIDIZING BIG AGRICULTURE

The Legislature recently spent **\$6.2 million** on subsidies for the agricultural industry through the Resilient Food Systems Grant program.<sup>27</sup> This funding is to be distributed to food producers to “expand capacity for the aggregation, processing, manufacturing, storing, transporting, wholesaling, and distribution of Idaho food products.”

Though it can sound like a good idea to ensure our food supply is “resilient,” these subsidies don’t work to achieve this objective. They extend beyond the proper role of government to choose winners and losers in the industry. This disincentivizes competition and decouples market demand from what is actually on the shelves. All this is at the price of inflation that restricts consumers’ ability to purchase these very products.

## “NO-FEE” FOR YOU, BUT SOMEONE PAYS FOR IT

There’s an old saying about no free lunch, but in Idaho, there’s a free ID card. In 2023, the Idaho Legislature passed House Bill 340 (Freedom Index -2) to require the state to issue a no-fee state identification card for voters who lack other forms of ID. Like any other government service that’s provided for “free,” it’s actually just forcing those who pay for driver’s licenses and ID cards to subsidize ID cards for those who claim they need a free ID for voting purposes. The bill’s fiscal note estimated approximately 2,000 no-fee ID cards that would normally cost \$15 each, or up to **\$30,000** in subsidized ID cards. In 2024, the Idaho Legislature passed House Bill 532 (Freedom Index -1) to repeal the requirement that an individual seeking a no-fee ID card must not have had a current driver’s license in the preceding six months. This change made it even easier for people to obtain a subsidized ID card.

## GOVERNMENT POKETING YOUR MONEY

The Idaho budget has many coffers to stow away money that otherwise would be returned to the taxpayers. One such coffer is the Budget Stabilization Fund. The limit of the fund is a function of how much revenue the state brings in each year. This year, however, revenues are down by just over 5%. This should have resulted in **\$33.5 million** returned to the General Fund.<sup>28</sup> To give you a little perspective on just how large the Budget Stabilization Fund truly is, this \$33.5 million is merely 3.8% of the total fund balance.

But the Legislature was unwilling to cut these idle funds. Instead of returning them to the pockets of taxpayers struggling to pay for everyday expenses, they used the legislation to eliminate the statutory cap on the budget stabilization fund. This effectively steals \$33.5 million that never belonged to the government in the first place.

The Budget Stabilization Fund is merely one of several reserve funds in which the state keeps tax dollars stowed away. Nearly **\$1.3 billion** in funds are locked away from taxpayers.<sup>29</sup> These funds backstop everything from public employee payroll to education to emergencies. The Legislature even added a new reserve fund called the Medicaid Budget Stabilization Fund to help support Medicaid's runaway entitlement costs.

In all, the government should have minimal-to-no reserve funds. Hard times serve as the only impetus for the government to really look into the books and figure out what is necessary to sustain. If they need more funds to make ends meet, they have to justify to the taxpayers why they are important to keep going. But this reveals why the government prioritizes keeping these funds alive; they worry taxpayers just might say no.

## LUMA LEAVING MONEY ON THE TABLE

The state hasn't fared too well when implementing software changes. Luma is the most recent — and probably the most egregious — example of this.

Luma is the state's new financial management system. It manages the cash flow and accounting in every agency. This is a radical change from the antiquated and rather disjointed system that preceded it, but the rollout has been far from smooth.

According to a new state report to the Legislature, the 2018 projections of the original expected cost of the new software was \$102 million but the State Controller's Office already spent \$117 million by the 2024 fiscal year.<sup>30</sup> The projected total cost of implementation is expected to reach **\$221 million** by 2034.

The system has technical issues, too. For the first quarter of the state fiscal year, there was no accurate data on tax collections. This prevented agencies from accurately tracking spending against how much was in the bank.<sup>31</sup>

Other issues included accidentally double-paying \$32 million in welfare benefits to Medicaid beneficiaries. Embarrassment aside, these errant transactions were able to be undone with minimal harm done to the taxpayer and beneficiaries.

The software is also exceedingly inefficient so far. The state is hiring new employees to keep up, and these positions are here to stay. A survey of agency directors noted that virtually no agencies plan to cut positions because of Luma.

Additional inefficiencies include the fact that some old systems are still needed and state purchasing practices were not due to the switch. Combined, these inefficiencies eat-away Luma's promised savings of \$212 million in the decade after its implementation.<sup>32</sup> These unaccounted-for costs will continue to take our tax dollars for many years to come.

## **GUARANTEED TO HURT TAXPAYERS**

Idaho guarantees retirement payments to workers who participate in its Public Employee Retirement System of Idaho, or PERSI.

This program promises not only to provide retirements for government workers but also guarantees to add to the heavy load taxpayers carry.

Private sector workers are lucky to find a company that matches retirement payments up to 4% or 5% of their salary. Not government employees in Idaho, though.

Thanks to you, lucky taxpayers, governments across the state contribute 11.96% of a general government employee's salary to retirement. School employees enjoy an even better deal, too. School districts across the state pitch in 13.48% of an employee's salary for retirement. Of course, police and fire workers get the best deal. Governments in Idaho pitch in a whopping 14.65% of a public safety employee's salary toward retirement.

The PERSI fund, worth \$24.9 billion in September of 2024, rarely receives attention in the press or the Capitol. Every once in a while, though, media outlets notice how the program hoovers up taxpayer cash.

Earlier this year, BoiseDev wrote about the PERSI contribution rate increase, which took effect July 1, 2024.<sup>33</sup> That 1.25% increase, approved in 2022 and split between employees and employers, was costly. Boise alone faces \$2.8 million in additional pension payments. Last year, Boise paid more than \$17.4 million for retirement costs. This year, that figure jumps to \$20.2 million.

The change hit Ada County hard, too. Boise Dev reported that Ada County retirement costs spiked more than \$2.6 million annually.

The program only promises to get more expensive in the coming years. PERSI has a 2.50% rate hike set for July 1, 2025, plus another 3.75% rate increase effective July 1, 2026.<sup>34</sup> Generally, employers cover two-thirds of rate increases, and employees cover the rest.



# HEALTHCARE



## THE COST OF GOVERNMENT MEDDLING

During the 2023 legislative session, the Idaho Freedom Foundation helped convince a House committee not to extend the sunset date for the Maternal Mortality Review Committee, effectively ending it. The argument against the committee is obvious — it's a waste of taxpayer dollars. Only 42 pregnant women died in Idaho between 2018 and 2021 out of tens of thousands of live births, and the committee itself admitted that its purpose was not to provide specific solutions related to the deaths that occurred.

Nevertheless, in 2024, the Idaho Legislature passed House Bill 399 (Freedom Index -2) to authorize the Board of Medicine to collect and review data about maternal mortality and require the board to provide an annual summary of the issue to the Legislature. Worse still, the bill's dishonest fiscal note claimed the "legislation causes no additional expenditures of funds" but offered no explanation for how the man hours required for the data compilation and analysis required by the bill would be funded.

On a similar note, the Legislature also passed House Bill 439 (Freedom Index -2) last session to extend the sunset clause for the Idaho Immunization Assessment Board and the program it oversees, keeping it in operation for another five years. The program spends money on "vaccine purchases for program-eligible children" and "any necessary costs and expenses to administer the fund and discharge the duties of the board."

## MEDICAID PORK EXPANDED AGAIN

Medicaid is one of the costliest government programs, accounting for more than \$824 billion in government spending across the country in FY 2022.<sup>35</sup> More than \$3.2 billion of that was spent in Idaho. In 2024, the Idaho Legislature passed House Bill 633 (Freedom Index -5) to expand Medicaid to offer increased postpartum coverage. While advocates of this expansion tried to disguise the increased spending as a “transfer,” the price tag for the first year was **\$55 million**. Given the astronomical rate of increase we’ve seen in Medicaid spending in recent years, this number will likely grow rapidly.

## THAT’S SOME EXPENSIVE SOFTWARE

Medicaid has always been a black hole of government spending, and its ever-escalating administrative costs are a significant portion of the bloat. In 2023, the Idaho Legislature passed Senate Bill 1097 (Freedom Index -3) to create a new fund to spend an estimated **\$187 million** on “Medicaid management information systems.”

## BIGGER GOVERNMENT, MORE SPENDING

You might think that a state like Idaho would avoid expanding government and increasing spending to hire more government employees, but sadly, that’s not the case. In 2024, the Idaho Legislature passed Senate Bill 1380 (Freedom Index -3) to create the Office of Health and Social Services Ombudsman. The bill’s fiscal note estimated the office would require at least three full-time positions and cost Idaho taxpayers **nearly half a million dollars** in its first year. Due to salary increases, the rising costs of benefits, general inflation, and the propensity of government to grow, it is reasonable to assume that the ongoing costs for this new office will increase annually.

## OVERSPENDING IS THE REAL EMERGENCY

Government has a bad habit of trying to fix what isn’t broken. One of the ways the state does this is by trying to take over and centralize local government services. In 2023, the Idaho Legislature passed Senate Concurrent Resolution 101 (Freedom Index -3), calling on the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare to develop a plan and draft legislation to create a state Emergency Medical Services system. The bill’s fiscal note called for spending **\$700,000** over the next two years just on planning for this expansion of government.

## IDHW EATING UP THE BUDGET IN THEIR BREAKROOM

The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare received **\$119,300** to renovate its break room at the Twin Falls office.<sup>36</sup> Not only does this not aid in the efficiency or expand the capacity of the agency, but this is merely the latest example of funding dedicated to wants rather than needs.

## GOVERNMENT-MONITORED PARENTING

Just one example of an expensive and invasive program within the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare is the Maternal, Infant, and Early Child Home Visiting Program (MIECHV). This program sends government officials to the homes of Idaho residents, monitors their children, and teaches them how to parent. This program squarely oversteps the proper role of government. It also injects woke culture into Idahoan homes by instructing parents on “positive parenting practices.” This government-approved parenting approach is driven by social-emotional learning (SEL) and is also used as the basis for furthering diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) agenda. This program cost **\$3.3 million** of federal funding in the 2024 fiscal year.<sup>37</sup>

## FUNDING THE WOKE MEDICINE PIPELINE

People may not know it, but Idaho does have a state medical school. It is physically located on the University of Idaho campus and operates under the purview of the University of Washington School of Medicine through a program called WWAMI (an acronym constructed from the member states of the UW program including Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, and Idaho). But with contracting through a woke university, woke ideals get injected into Idaho’s future medical workforce.<sup>38</sup>

UW was recently in hot water for its involvement in a scheme with Planned Parenthood to have students and faculty facilitate abortions, harvest the body parts of the infants, and sell them to other universities for research. These activities are not only illegal under Idaho code but fail to acknowledge the sanctity of life for these unborn children.

Additionally, the WWAMI program at the University of Idaho is guilty of promoting LGBTQ, Critical Race Theory, and transgender-based medicine. These woke ideologies are part of key courses all students are required to take to graduate from the school. They are also part of elective courses students must take later on in order to specialize, including fields Idaho is actively recruiting for, like family medicine.

Though not all the funding for the school could be considered wasteful, a nontrivial portion of the **\$7,518,400** Idaho WWAMI received in the 2025 fiscal year supports these operations.<sup>39</sup> These activities detract from the mission of medicine and the unbiased ethos of do no harm.

## EXPANDING MEDICAL WELFARE ENTITLEMENTS

Medicaid expansion to able-bodied, working-aged adults was Idaho's most expensive policy blunder, but to date, the expected cost continues to grow. Medicaid expansion offers more federal money for the able-bodied than they do for other groups — a 90% federal match for this population compared to about 68% for everyone else. This poor policy design encourages states to use Medicaid as a shell game to offer more generous benefits while offloading the costs to the federal taxpayer.

In 2024, the Legislature approved the expansion of postpartum coverage for new mothers on Medicaid. This population was moved to the Medicaid expansion population to gain the advantage of the larger federal match. Policymakers asserted that this was merely a transfer of about **\$55 million** from one plan to the other within Medicaid, meaning there would be no additional cost to the taxpayer.<sup>40</sup>

What policymakers failed to account for was this policy change also expanded benefits for postpartum mothers. These recipients will now get 12 months of coverage, which is substantially longer than what they received under the old arrangement.<sup>41</sup> This will inevitably result in more services rendered and higher costs to those funding this new entitlement, the taxpayers.

## PAYING FOR INELIGIBLES ON MEDICAID

Early in the pandemic, Congress passed the Families First Coronavirus Response Act to address the effects of the government's response to the virus. Aside from spending \$3.4 trillion total and adding **\$192 billion** to the federal deficit, this law also expanded entitlements for millions on Medicaid.<sup>42,43</sup>

Ordinarily, people are removed from the Medicaid program for no longer qualifying. However, states were enticed to leave ineligible people on the rolls in exchange for additional money from Washington, D.C. For years, the only ways people could exit the program were if they moved out of state, died, or asked to be removed. This provision was called continuous eligibility.

Idaho was also complicit in this scheme, leaving more than 100,000 ineligible on the rolls until September 2023. No one knows how much this cost because we cannot know when these people became ineligible after they were enrolled. Many could have been on the rolls for years without qualifying for their benefits.

What we do know, however, is how much it cost Idahoans to retain ineligible on the rolls after Congress ended continuous eligibility. Some estimate retaining ineligible on the rolls cost taxpayers **\$42 million** per month.<sup>44</sup>

As the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare rolled back continuous eligibility, the Legislature opted to continue fully funding the Medicaid program. They did this in spite of evidence showing hundreds of millions would be returned to Idaho taxpayers by the end of the fiscal year. Ultimately, the agency took **\$277 million** they did not need, keeping it in government coffers.<sup>45</sup>

## SUBSIDIZING HIGHLY PAID PROFESSIONALS

One of the basic principles of conservatism is understanding that just because a job is important and worth doing doesn't mean it needs taxpayer-funded subsidies. In 2023, the Idaho Legislature passed House Bill 213 (Freedom Index -4) to establish a nursing incentive program that offers certain nurses up to \$25,000 in taxpayer-provided subsidies in the name of helping them pay off student loans. The bill's fiscal note projected the program would cost up to **\$2.5 million** over six years.

## PAYING “UNPAID” CAREGIVERS

COVID funding through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) provided a massive influx of dollars for new programs. The Idaho Commission on Aging — another example of a needless government agency since its only purpose is to disseminate federal money — created a pilot program to provide funding for unpaid caregivers of dementia patients.<sup>46</sup> This was one use of **\$1.8 million** in ARPA funds appropriated to the agency. The program, though temporary, is designed to provide support for permanent government benefits later on. This is especially problematic since ARPA funds are set to expire in 2026, meaning future program support will have to come from somewhere else.



## IDAHO IS FUNDING THE ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION CRISIS

Idaho generally talks tough on illegal immigration but few know that the state is actually supporting it through funding it. Since 2020, Idaho spent **\$45.6 million** on handouts for illegal immigrants. These mainly include health care for prenatal care, postnatal care, immunizations, and treatments for communicable diseases — which can range from the common cold to lifestyle-related infections like sexually transmitted diseases.

Should the current trends hold, Idaho can expect to spend another **\$10.9 million** in the next fiscal year. As long as these benefits continue, illegal immigrants will continue to settle in the Gem State on the government dole.

## ROLLING OUT THE WELCOME MAT FOR REFUGEES

Idaho receives the second most refugees per capita of any state in the nation as of the most recent data.<sup>47</sup> Idaho seems to have decided there is no better way to welcome them to the land of the free than with a dose of government dependency.

Idaho currently spends **\$1.7 million** on grants for refugees annually. These go to groups like Jannus' Agency for New Americans, a decidedly leftist organization that makes 70% of its money off government grants programs.

These grant programs are things like “cultural humility” training for medical providers and \$300,000 to tell refugees where they could get government money.

Refugees are even eligible for Refugee Medical Assistance, which is a Medicaid-like program that is even more generous than Medicaid for citizens. In fact, able-bodied, working-age refugees are allowed to earn up to 8% more than their citizen peers and still qualify.

Why are we not teaching refugees to assimilate to American culture and be self-sufficient?

## THE IRONY OF CHILDCARE SUBSIDIES

The Idaho Child Care Program (ICCP) is a program that was originally intended to subsidize child care for low-income working families with children under 13. Rather than being a relief for these families, it is exacerbating the childcare crisis. ICCP benefit payouts alone are expected to cost **\$52.8 million** by the end of the 2025 fiscal year.

This program was expected to go over budget by nearly \$16 million until the agency director, Alex Adams, paused the program and reduced eligibility and payouts.<sup>48</sup>

Leftists blamed the deficit on the 25% increase in childcare costs and illustrated the need to expand the program. Ironically, the program is driving these added costs through poor incentives. Because the program pays based on average market rates, daycares are incentivized to raise their market rates to get a higher guaranteed payout. This continues the cycle of rising prices, rising need for the program, more subsidies, and even higher prices.

Rather than helping Idahoans, this program is actually hurting their ability to be self-reliant.



# EDUCATION



## DEI LIVES ON IN IDAHO HIGHER EDUCATION

A staple of the woke counterculture is the use of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs in America's institutions for higher education. Idaho is far from insulated from this destructive ideology. The Idaho Freedom Foundation estimates that as much as **\$6 million** annually goes to support 75 DEI positions across Idaho's four higher education institutions.<sup>49</sup> These include Boise State University, Idaho State University, the University of Idaho, and Lewis and Clark State College.

The DEI problem has been pervasive over the years. The University of Idaho hired the state's first DEI officer in 2015 to be their Chief Diversity Officer. After years of growth and after experiencing the negative repercussions of these activities, the Legislature ultimately cut \$2.5 million as a "social justice reduction" to get the universities to start reversing course. Instead, the institutions openly grew their diversity programs, with funding from private sources.

The Legislature not only rewarded them by looking the other way, but since the social justice reduction, it has reinstated all of the money that was cut.

## SMALL, EXPENSIVE SCHOOL DISTRICTS

In our 2013 Pork Report, we lamented that the Avery School District was spending \$53,155 per pupil for just 14 students and suggested that the district should consider more affordable alternatives. At the time, it had the highest per-pupil spending in the state. A decade later, Avery’s average daily attendance has increased to 22 and its per-pupil expenditures have come down somewhat to **\$34,428**, although it is still 3.5 times higher than the state average.<sup>50</sup>

Avery is no longer the worst offender, however. Three Creek Joint Elementary (District #416) has just five students enrolled and per-pupil expenditures of **\$49,823** — more than five times higher than the state average!<sup>51</sup>

There are other examples, too. Prairie Elementary (District #191) has six students enrolled and per-pupil expenditures of **\$31,671**. Pleasant Valley Elementary (District #364) has seven students enrolled and per-pupil expenditures of **\$28,869**.<sup>52,53</sup>

To reiterate the point we made a decade ago, legislators need to look at alternative ways to educate students in these tiny districts that require unreasonably disproportionate per-pupil funding to remain operational.

## COLLECTING DATA ON IDAHO K-12 STUDENTS

The Legislature appropriated **\$350,000** to the State Department of Education to create a suicide prevention and student wellness tool.<sup>54</sup> This tool collects data on the students participating in the program. The data was noted to be used to “better address issues moving forward” but can subject students — and their families — to government surveillance.

## ARTS IN RURAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The government is not shy about frivolous expenditures in the name of education. For the 2025 fiscal year, the Legislature appropriated an additional **\$250,000** in funding for grants designed to support arts activities in rural public schools.<sup>55</sup> These funds are distributed in the form of grants in cooperation with the Arts Commission. The money is in addition to the **\$1 million** already in the budget from the 2024 fiscal year’s appropriation.

## WHAT IS THE POINT OF A FUNDING FORMULA ANYWAY?

The point of a funding formula is to ensure that schools receive money based on the number of students they are actually teaching. When the number of students goes down, schools naturally see a reduction in costs. Funding formulas are supposed to return those excess funds to the taxpayer.

For the 2024 fiscal year, public schools overshot their projections for how many students would be in the classroom based on average daily attendance. This resulted in the Legislature over-spending on K-12 by **\$105 million!**<sup>56</sup> These funds were set to be returned to the taxpayer until the Legislature used budget gimmicks to ensure schools got to keep the funds anyway. This was probably one of the most underreported heists of the year, given that schools got funding for costs not incurred, using money they weren't entitled to spend.



## THE COST OF “FREE” TEXTBOOKS

The government is masterful at spending millions on things that should be free. One example of this in Idaho can be found in the Open Education Initiative. This program is the state’s effort to drive community colleges to use more open-source materials in their courses to make college more affordable for all.

On its face, directing college professors to use more open-source materials in their courses seems like a reasonable and effective solution to making college more affordable. This program, however, uses taxpayer dollars for the government to produce these materials and then pays professors to use them. This incentive can be as high as \$2,000 per class!

This strategy will cost taxpayers **\$1,829,800** in the 2025 fiscal year to promote materials that are supposed to be free.<sup>57</sup> It is also anti-free-market, as the government is replacing a product with its own, then paying customers (professors) to use them. This both thwarts the private dissemination of knowledge and ignores the real reason why college is expensive — government subsidization of the market.

## TAKING A BITE OUT OF THE BUDGET

In the 2025 legislative session, lawmakers appropriated **\$299,000** in COVID relief money to the State Department of Education to teach children about where their food comes from. It is unclear why this couldn’t be absorbed by existing instruction costs.<sup>58</sup>

Projects such as these are emblematic of what happens when the government is flush with cash but must look for ways to spend it. This is hardly a justifiable use of pandemic relief funds that were supposed to address the hardships resulting from the government’s mismanagement of the pandemic.

## PUBLIC SCHOOLS AS WELFARE BROKERS

As part of the emergency funding from the COVID pandemic, schools received hundreds of millions through something called the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER III). One of the uses Idaho schools employed these funds for was what they dubbed as “homelessness funding,” but it was much more than that. This money ultimately went to pay for temporary housing, eyeglasses, supplies,

technology, and after-school programs. This is a particularly egregious example where public schools are losing sight of their mission to educate Idaho's youth by dabbling in the realm of providing welfare.

This program is not only beyond the proper role of government — and public schools — but is fiscally irresponsible. This project cost taxpayers **\$99,957,700** for the 2025 fiscal year.<sup>59</sup> These funds were originally provided by the American Rescue Plan Act and are set to expire in 2026. Since they are being used for entitlements that will inevitably create dependency, Idaho taxpayers can expect bureaucrats to ask them to foot the bill once federal funds run dry.

## MOVING THE GOALPOSTS ON CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

The “foot in the door” approach is a psychological technique where one makes a small, reasonable ask at first, only to lay the groundwork for a larger ask later on. This is the approach often seen by Idaho's institutions when completing long-term projects like building construction.

Idaho's colleges and universities are no strangers to this approach.<sup>60</sup> Just in the last legislative session, Boise State University asked for an additional \$13 million to support the construction of their new science and research building. But the project already received \$17.9 million in state funds to complement the \$87 million received from other sources to support the project. Explaining this 73% increase in state support was largely boiled down to “rising construction costs.”

The University of Idaho is not a stranger to the foot-in-the-door strategy either. A combined **\$4 million** was appropriated during this legislative session to support the existing construction of a meat science facility and renovation of the McCall K-12 STEM Education campus. The meat science facility already received \$3 million in state funding to build a facility designed to “connect stakeholders to the concept of understanding where their food they consume comes from.”

In McCall, the STEM Education campus was set to receive a new kitchen and dining facility. This project already received \$4 million in funding. Why the extra funding? The Legislative Services Office reported to the Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee that the scope and vision of the project expanded, necessitating more funds. This incrementalism allows projects such as these to drift. For each year these projects go on, inflation and shifting visions cause spending to grow.



# TRANSPORTATION



## ON THIS DAY IN 2024, WASTEFUL SPENDING HAPPENED

The Idaho legislature spent **\$697,000** for the Idaho Transportation Department to upgrade historic markers throughout the state.<sup>61</sup> This is all federal funding that was marketed as a way to “promote Idaho’s heritage.” Considering the frivolousness of programs such as this one, it is no wonder why the national debt is approaching \$36 trillion at the time of printing.

## \$347 MILLION IN EXTRA SPENDING FOR TRANSPORTATION

If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again. That sums up the fight over the appropriation for the Transportation Department (ITD) in the 2024 session. The appropriations bill took several tries because state-owned surplus property that the Department of Administration wanted to sell was revoked by the bill as follows: “Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, the authority of the Department of Administration to dispose of the state administrative facility and property at 3311 W State Street, Boise, Idaho 83703 is revoked.” The disputed property had a lot of value for developers, and the Legislature was divided into factions over whether the property that housed the Transportation Department should remain in state hands or be sold.





## SUBSIDIZING PUBLIC TRANSIT WITH COVID MONEY

Even though the COVID pandemic has been over for years, the state continues to fund programs using relief dollars. Just this year, the Idaho Legislature appropriated **\$5 million** to provide additional subsidies for the public transit system without any real reason to subsidize it beyond ordinary levels.<sup>62</sup> Subsidizing the program provides funding where there isn't demand to support it once the emergency dollars run out.

# RESOURCES



## FISH AND GAME'S NEW WEBSITE

We all like nice things, but there comes a point where the cost is just too excessive to justify. The Department of Fish and Game was appropriated **\$750,000** this fiscal year and is expected to spend another **\$350,000** next year to revamp its website.<sup>63</sup> The total cost of the project could be up to **\$1.1 million** for the agency's digital facelift.

Though it is important to some extent to ensure a website keeps up with the times and continues to serve constituents well, the price just isn't right in this case.

## BUREAUCRATS FLEX THEIR 'MUSSELS' FOR MORE FUNDING

In 2023, the officials at the Dept. of Agriculture discovered Quagga Mussel larva in the Snake River near Twin Falls. Quagga Mussels are very invasive and can have a substantial negative impact on Idaho's waterways. The state already spends millions each year to furnish boat inspections and water testing as preventative measures. Despite the scare, the crisis was largely resolved by the time the legislative session rolled around in January.

But bureaucrats weren't done with the crisis. They asked for **\$11,569,900** in new funding to support new staff, check stations, IT services, supplies, training, travel, and sampling equipment.<sup>64</sup> Even if this was just the state being aggressive against a potentially destructive infestation of Quagga

Mussels, the aim of this funding was a permanent expansion of the program and staff. About **\$1.6 million** will become a permanent, recurring expense despite it being unnecessary.

## THE COST OF TRANSPARENCY?

The Department of Fish and Game was appropriated **\$3 million** this fiscal year to expand their facility in Pocatello.<sup>65</sup> This includes building a new wing of the building, complete with new furnishings and technology. In their presentation before the Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee, the director noted this was due to a rule change that required the department to hold public meetings. But this doesn't justify the expense of a new, upgraded facility.

Other entities looking for a room typically rent a public meeting space in the county courthouse or another facility that could accommodate a gallery for little to no expense. A similar case can be made for technology to record the meetings, as this equipment doesn't need to cost \$3 million to acquire.

## MAINTAINING THE CASH FLOW

The Department of Fish and Game appropriated another **\$20 million** in funding to address deferred maintenance at parks around the state.<sup>66</sup> Keep in mind that this is in addition to the **\$95 million** already appropriated for such a purpose last year.

What makes this spending more egregious is it comes from federal dollars spent through the American Rescue Plan Act. These funds were originally granted to mitigate the negative effects of the government's response to the pandemic. However, this expense is hardly related to mitigating the government's declared public health emergency, nor is it necessary considering the funding already available.

## DÉJÀ VU ALL OVER AGAIN FOR SEASONAL PAY

The Department of Fish and Game received an additional **\$200,000** to provide pay increases for seasonal employees within the department.<sup>67</sup> This increase comes on the heels of a **\$150,000** increase for the same line item in last year's budget.

Each year, the department reported the need to be competitive with other career options to retain the seasonal staff they depend on to do business. But in the same breath, the director reported to the committee that last year's increase was effective at meeting this goal. Therefore, it doesn't make any sense as to why the department would ask for even more just one year later.

# CRIMINAL JUSTICE



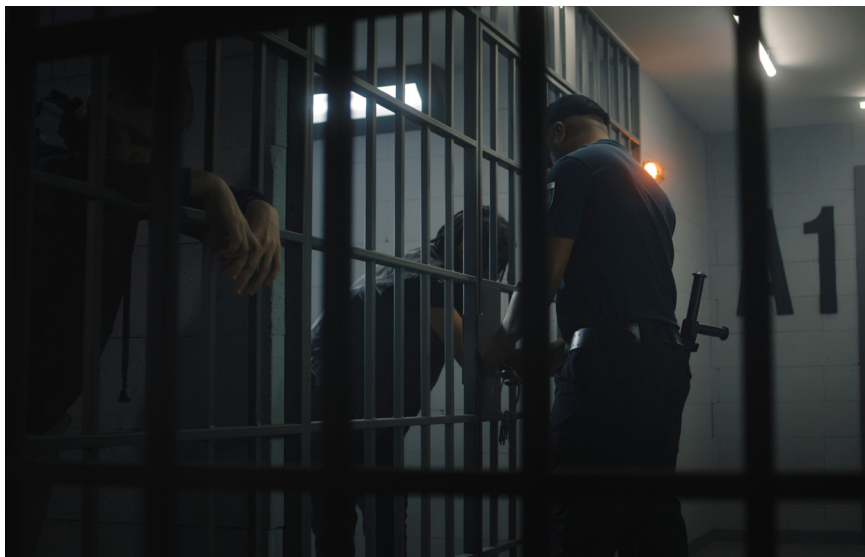
## A 46% PAY INCREASE FOR ACTORS

The Idaho State Police operates the POST Academy to train peace officers throughout the state. Part of the training requires some reenactment of scenarios for officer candidates to practice with. Naturally, this requires actors to pose as criminals or bystanders. These actors recently got a hefty 46% pay increase this year, raising their pay from \$13.75 per hour to \$20.00 per hour. This resulted in a total increase of **\$28,000** in costs to the taxpayer.<sup>68</sup>

## INMATE TRACKING SYSTEMS

The Idaho Department of Corrections received **\$1.1 million** to install a new tracking system for prison inmates.<sup>69</sup> The department noted this new system “provide[s] more opportunity for residents [inmates] to make better decisions and be rewarded for doing so.” In reality, it shouldn’t be that hard for the prisons to track the location and behavior of inmates in secured spaces. Prisons got along for quite some time without this technology.





The Department also received an additional **\$402,000** to implement a pilot program for COVID health monitoring for inmates. This program would spend federal funds to provide RFID bracelets that track the health of inmates at all times. This includes metrics like pulse, respiratory rate, and temperature. Not only is this program unnecessary, particularly as the pandemic is long behind us, but it is unclear what will happen once temporary federal funds dry up.

## NO OVERSIGHT ON THE OFFICE OF DRUG POLICY

New programs typically have oversight built into their founding language to protect taxpayers and curb the bureaucracy. But sometimes bureaucrats get ahead of themselves and the Legislature allows them to get away with it.

In the 2024 legislative session, lawmakers appropriated **\$100,000** to the Office of Drug Policy to issue “Community Models Grants” for nonprofit entities to implement preventative drug abuse programs.<sup>70</sup> This money comes from the Opioid Settlement Fund — a collection of money created from a lawsuit against the drug industry. The office was supposed to note who would receive these grants, and these funds were never supposed to be designated for such a purpose without recommendation from the Behavioral Health Council. So much for oversight.

# SECRETARY OF STATE



## ELECTION SOFTWARE DO-OVER

In 2023, the legislature provided **\$10 million** to the Secretary of State to replace their existing elections management system.<sup>71</sup> This would take the current, all-in-one system and break it into three separate data management systems — lobbying, elections, and campaign finance.

Though this was done in response to complaints about the old system it is unlikely that this new system will be any better. For one, this system is substantially more expensive than the old one (which cost \$3.8 million to procure). The secretary also had to hire several new staff positions to run the new system due to its complexity and lack of an all-in-one structure. This shows that the new system lacks efficiency, usability, and durability, leading one to ask why this idea was carried out.

## THE ADDRESS CONFIDENTIALITY CONFERENCE

In the 2025 fiscal year, the Office of the Secretary of State requested **\$5,000** to host the National Address Confidentiality Conference.<sup>72</sup> The address confidentiality program is a way for the state to launder an



endangered person's mail to protect their anonymity. Though the program itself serves an important function, it is frivolous for Idaho to spend money to host the conference.

What's worse is that the funds would be permanent to create a new Businesses Against Trafficking Program. Not only is this outside the role of the Office of the Secretary of State, but it is merely a way for the agency to interact with anti-trafficking nonprofits, an activity that shouldn't cost anything.

## **CERTIFIED ELECTION/REGISTRATION ADMINISTRATORS**

The Secretary of State received **\$20,000** in ongoing travel costs and related expenses to get his elections staff certified as election and registration administrators.<sup>73</sup> However, this certification is completely optional and administered by a nonprofit outside of the state.

Idaho's elections are administered at the county level and governed by state law (and some case law). Therefore, in-house training, not a national certification, is far more effective at training employees on administering election laws that are peculiar to Idaho.

# LOCAL GOVERNMENT



## THERE ONCE WAS A POET FROM COEUR D'ALENE...

In the summer of 2024, the Coeur d'Alene City Council created the position of “Coeur d'Alene Poet Laureate” and ultimately appointed Jennifer Passaro to serve in the position.<sup>74</sup> The proposal said that “along with offering readings and workshops, the Poet Laureate writes poems for the city that are reflective of local landscapes, social situations, or important events.” This appointee will receive an annual stipend of \$1,500 and serve a three-year term for a total of **\$4,500**. While there is much that could be said about this concept, we'll summarize by suggesting there are already more than enough poems about social situations being written by artisanal coffee-drinking hipsters. We really don't need government to subsidize more of them.

## EXPENSIVE REBRANDING CAN'T MASK FISCAL INCOMPETENCE

In May 2024, BoiseDev reported that the Ada County Highway District (ACHD) spent nearly \$178,000 to update its logo and brands, including the Commuteride shuttle service brand.<sup>75</sup> The \$178,000 was part of a



larger **\$400,000** allocation for rebranding and website updates. About half of the \$178,000 went to a Tennessee firm, North Star Place Branding, which specializes in branding for government agencies. Nearly \$24,000 was spent on vehicle wraps and door graphics, and another \$9,000 was used to purchase hundreds of branded trucker caps. More than \$2,000 was spent on sweets, including 450 packets of M&Ms and 450 sugar cookies with the new logo, which an ACHD spokesperson suggested would “help build excitement and encourage employees to embrace the new brand.” Those branded sweets for ACHD employees might just leave a bitter taste in the mouths of Ada County taxpayers.

## AUDITORIUM DISTRICTS ARE JUST ANOTHER FORM OF COERCIVE REDISTRIBUTION

Recently, voters in Nampa, Idaho, passed a measure to create an auditorium district that will take in more than **\$1.2 million** from taxpayers to subsidize the Nampa Civic Center and Idaho Center. If these institutions are worth maintaining, they ought to be able to fund themselves through the revenue they generate. If they can’t, why should property taxpayers be forced to make up the difference?

## FEDERAL DEBT FUNDS BOISE’S SOCIALIST DREAMS

The U.S. is more than \$36 trillion in debt, but apparently, that’s not enough to stop the flow of funds to a host of redistributive programs run by state and local governments. Take the recent announcement from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that the city of Boise was awarded \$3.2 million to fund programs targeting teen homelessness.<sup>76</sup> That’s in addition to a **\$3.8 million** grant from HUD to the Idaho Housing and Finance Association for similar purposes. Combatting homelessness may sound like a noble goal, but burdening future generations with more debt to fund today’s government programs only makes things worse.

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