

2026

Idaho Report on Government Waste

The Pork Report Idaho's government
doesn't want **YOU** to read!



IDAHO FREEDOM
FOUNDATION

OUR MISSION

Idaho Freedom Foundation's mission is to defeat Marxism and socialism by holding government accountable and building a culture of liberty around America's founding principles so Idahoans can prosper.

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Imagine sending your kid to the store to buy some bread and milk with a \$20 bill, and he comes back with a loaf, a jug, and zero dollars of change. Wouldn't you want to know what happened to the rest of the money? Did he spend it on something else? Did he keep it? Did he lose it? Did someone take it from him?

What about when government does the same with your tax dollars? They take your taxes (by force), they are given the charge of assigning and performing limited government duties (via the Constitution), and they come back with zero change and sometimes a bill for more taxes. Where did the money go? Did they waste it, defraud you, or abuse the system? Where is the accountability? We may never know all the answers, but this 2026 edition of Idaho Freedom Foundation's "Pork Report" gives us a glimpse into the waste, fraud, and abuse in all levels of Idaho government. It's eye opening and heartbreaking.

While many Idaho families, businesses, and seniors are crushed by inflation and taxes, we see billions of their dollars squandered on socialist programs and stupid plans, some of it stolen via corruption and fraud, and some lost through abuse of the system, negligence, and downright incompetence.

This Pork Report highlights (or should it be lowlights?) a few of the most egregious cases of waste and inefficiency. It's certainly not all the excess in the system, but it gives a taste of what's happening more broadly. Sadly, this report alone tallies up to well over **\$2 billion** of misappropriations and misuses.

Money was overspent and wasted on things like being subservient to federal control via Department of Environmental Quality's entire budget (**\$97 million**), massive spending on a state computer program fraught with errors known as LUMA (**\$200 million**), and a program to teach teachers how to teach phonics (**\$78 million**), just to name a few.

While we might shake our heads at some of the more comical examples of bad spending (flagpoles and pride banners in Boise, and a **\$4 million** program for using AI in colleges), imagine the value to families that could have come from them keeping, on average, another \$2,000 of their dollars instead.

Politicians and bureaucrats find it extremely easy to spend and speculate, especially because it's **not** their money. In most cases it's simply pushing the YES button on their voting consoles. The ease and speed of voting YES on spending, a project, or a program belies the real and significant consequences of those decisions.

The incentives to spend and grow are positive and numerous for the elected official. They get praise and adoring press coverage for every new project, new program, and new example of "caring" they exhibit by voting YES. On the other hand, they lack any real incentives to economize, prevent waste, and avoid abuse. Rarely are they praised or adored for voting no on one of these plans to have government "save the day."

They're human too. A few — too many, really — succumb to the temptations to defraud the taxpayer and abuse the system for their own benefits, their friends or families, or their pet projects. The result of all this? Pork. We send them to the Capitol, City Hall, and the County Commissions to be wise stewards for us. They hire government employees to carry out plans. We dutifully send them our dollars, they complete our shopping list, and return with zero change. Sometimes they even come back saying they need to take more money. Where did OUR \$20 go?

This 2026 edition of the Pork Report gives a few of the answers. We have work to do, my fellow Idahoans. The cost falls on all of us, the money disappears, and the bread and milk don't add up. We must find the pork and eliminate the waste, fraud, and abuse. Our fellow families and businesses depend on it.

Our Pork Report and all the amazing research and legislative work IFF does is only possible with the support and trust of our partners. You can assist our efforts by joining our IFF membership and staying informed of what is happening in Idaho's government on a regular basis all year long.

In liberty, with firm reliance on our Creator,



Ronald M. Nate, Ph.D.
President, Idaho Freedom Foundation



THE WORST OF THE WORST

WHAT THE FLOCK?

Local governments across Idaho are spending tens of thousands — in some cases, hundreds of thousands — on implementing Automated License Plate Readers (ALPRs), which utilize artificial intelligence to spy on vehicles.



The City of Caldwell approved a three-year-deal with Flock in 2023 to install 33 cameras.¹ The previous mayor, Jarom Wagoner, authorized the reallocation of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to purchase ALPRs, according to records obtained by IFF.² The deal totaled over **\$378,000**. Caldwell's City Council reportedly voted in October to authorize a **\$6.7 million**, 10-year contract with Axon. The vote greenlights switching from Flock to Axon for ALPRs, increasing cameras from 45 to 65 in Caldwell.³

Some of the funds for these cameras may derive from Department of Justice (DOJ) grants.⁴ Idaho Falls received a **\$57,218** grant in 2024 from former President Joe Biden's DOJ under the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant Program. It's unclear how many other cities are using federal funds for these programs, but regardless, taxpayers are on the hook for surveillance technology.

Pocatello reportedly spent **\$102,000** in December 2024 to purchase 34 Flock ALPRs.⁵ Former Mayor Brian Blad signed an order form that same month for **\$338,100** total over about three years.⁶ This should not come as a surprise, given Bannock County's alleged history of treating taxpayer money as a slush fund.⁷

Meridian appears to have one of the most expensive agreements with an ALPR company. Meridian's Chief of Police signed an amendment to a Master Services and Purchasing Agreement with Axon in December 2025. The contract totaled **\$11,296,572.65**, spanning from January 2026 to March 2033, according to a quote obtained by IFF. (There is not a payment for February 2026 noted in the quote, but the contract was estimated to start that month.) The agreement included additional technology and equipment aside from ALPRs.⁸

In March 2025, Lewiston PD signed an order form with Flock Safety for a total of **\$43,050** over 24 months.⁹ Twin Falls PD has been using ALPRs since December 2023,¹⁰ and it signed a **\$43,800** total Flock order form in 2025 for a one-year-term, documents show.¹¹

More recently, Nampa allocated **\$96,000** to replace eight ALPRs in its proposed FY27 budget.¹² The city is also asking residents to approve a \$5,000,000 permanent levy override to fund police in November.¹³

Smaller municipalities have also adopted ALPRs, with Wilder PD agreeing to a **\$28,000** total contract with Flock in 2025 over two years; each camera costs **\$3,500** annually, documents obtained by IFF show.¹⁴

The City of Greenleaf also has at least one ALPR camera.¹⁵ Wilder's City Council voted on Sept. 1, 2026, against an ordinance that would ban ALPRs.¹⁶

Bellevue's City Council voted in 2025 to fund two Flock cameras, reportedly costing **\$13,300** for two years of operation and equipment.¹⁷ The Kimberly-Hansen Police Chief signed an order form with Flock in September 2025 for **\$25,000** over two years, documents acquired by IFF show.¹⁸

Similarly, St. Anthony's PD signed a Flock order form totaling **\$34,000** in 2025 for a two-year-term.¹⁹

Multiple sheriffs' departments also have agreements with ALPR companies. The Ada County Sheriff's Department implemented 20 Axon cameras in the county.²⁰ Each camera costs **\$2,296.39** annually, or over **\$46,000** total. The City of Kuna recently removed five ALPRs at the request of the mayor's office.²¹

Likewise, Bonneville County Sheriff's Office agreed to a **\$71,000** total contract with Flock in December 2025 for one year, and Blaine County Sheriff's Office signed an order form in 2024 for **\$117,500** total over two years, documents obtained by IFF show.²²

While departments may renegotiate these contracts, quotes, or orders in the future — or abandon ALPRs altogether — it's notable that these entities were open to spending exorbitant amounts of funds on surveillance technology in the first place.

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE DISTRICTS

In addition to counties, cities, school districts (and a variety of other taxing districts), Idaho passed a law in 2008 allowing cities to create “community infrastructure districts” (CIDs) with the power to tax, borrow, and spend.²³ The City of Boise established the Harris Ranch Community Infrastructure District No. 1 in 2010, and the City of Eagle established the Spring Valley Community Infrastructure District No. 1 in 2012.

These were followed by the Avimor Community Infrastructure District No. 1 in 2015 and the Avimor Community Infrastructure District No. 2 in 2020.²⁴

The Harris Ranch CID has already issued more than **\$15.4 million** in general obligation bonds (it is authorized to issue up to **\$50 million**) and nearly **\$4 million** in special assessment bonds.²⁵

At the time of formation, the Spring Valley CID was authorized to issue up to **\$250 million** in general obligation bonds, but in 2022, it sought to increase that authorization to **\$600 million** plus an additional **\$311.5 million** in interest.²⁶

The ballot measure to approve the increase passed with just five total votes cast (all in favor) because the land in the district hadn’t yet been developed.²⁷ That debt would fall on thousands of future homeowners, who could be saddled with nearly **\$1 billion in debt and interest** to reimburse developers. The district’s FY26 budget was nearly **\$122 million**, with a proposed budget of just under **\$114 million** for FY27.²⁸

Avimor CID No. 1 is authorized to issue up to **\$250 million** in general obligation bonds. In 2023, the district was expanded nearly 30-fold, from 654 acres to just over 18,000.²⁹ The district has also seen its spending increase significantly from just under **\$23 million** in FY26 to a proposed budget of nearly **\$73 million** for FY27.³⁰

Following the expansion, Eagle City Council members now serve as the board for both Avimor CIDs, including No. 2, which focused on the portion of the development in Boise County.

In 2026, the Idaho Legislature passed House Bill 926 to allow counties to create community infrastructure districts as well.³¹

We will no doubt see an increase in associated taxing, borrowing, and spending as this new breed of taxing district proliferates across the state.

BOISE PRIDES ITSELF ON WASTEFUL SPENDING

The City of Boise's proposed budget for FY27 has ballooned to **\$1.235 billion**, a 30% increase from its **\$949 million** adopted budget in FY26, which was itself a 17% increase from FY25's **\$813 million budget**.³² Overall, the FY27 budget would be a 66% increase from FY24 when the budget was "just" **\$745 million**. If you exclude expenditures from the airport enterprise fund (which increased more rapidly), the increase is 24% from FY24 to FY27.

Boise's FY27 budget estimates its population at 256,450. Yet in its FY24 budget, the population estimate was 247,040.³³ That's less than a 4% increase in population over the same period.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the City of Boise also seems to raise property taxes every year. The last two years are no exception, with taxes being raised 4% in FY26 and 2.7% in FY27.³⁴ This year also includes a third open space levy, to the tune of **\$11 million**. The mayor insists these hikes protect core city services. Let's see what is really inside.

Priority one is gay Pride. After finally losing its flag war to the Legislature, the city found different and more expensive ways to continue their internecine conflict.

The city spent **\$10,553** in general funds dressing City Hall in Pride branding: **\$3,368** to wrap the flagpoles, **\$2,505** for 2,500 "City of Boise + Pride" flag pins, **\$1,632** for 2,500 window clings, and **\$1,944** for a single "Creating a City for Everyone" window decal.³⁵



Unsurprisingly, Boise's second most important issue is climate change. The city's "Keep Boise Cool" climate campaign burned **\$30,794**. The highlights: **\$9,000** for "Water Wise Workshops," **\$6,900** in \$300 stipends handed to 23 members of a volunteer "Climate Committee," and more than **\$13,000** on all manner of merchandise. The city even found money to expense roughly **\$1,600** in tabs at local breweries, coffee shops, bagel joints, and Bogus Basin.³⁶ Keeping cool, indeed.

These are not isolated incidents. The budget also included **\$400,000** for a Chinese-community public-art project, **\$25,000** for a temporary installation at the Erma Hayman House, tens of thousands more for painted utility boxes, and **\$2 million** to remodel its Planning & Development Services offices.³⁷

It also hired 24 new employees, including another librarian, a zoo worker, and a pool mechanic. It accepted a federal SAFER grant for nine firefighters with no funding plan when the grant runs out. You can guess what the solution will be.

The evidence is clear: the city has more than enough money for all of its needs and a whole lot more. What the city needs is spending discipline.

IT'S RAINING MONEY

The Idaho Water Resource Board (IWRB), which is primarily funded through legislative appropriations, spends millions of dollars every year on cloud seeding programs. In a 2026 presentation prepared for the Legislature, the IWRB listed nearly **\$3.5 million** as the “average annual operations cost” for cloud seeding in Idaho.³⁸ The majority of this funding comes from the IWRB.

This includes a collaborative project with the Utah Division of Water Resources in the Bear River Basin to which the IWRB contributed **\$950,000** in 2025 and another **\$1.2 million** in 2026.³⁹

As part of its cloud seeding programs, IWRB has transferred significant sums of money to the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Colorado, which the Trump administration is moving to dismantle, citing it as a hub for “federal climate alarmism.”⁴⁰ This includes a **\$300,000** contract in 2021⁴¹ and another **\$500,000** in 2025 as part of the Bear River Basin Project.⁴²

QUALITY “LEARING” CENTERS

We flagged the Idaho Child Care Program (ICCP) in 2024 for what it was: a government handout that would drive up demand for childcare, pay the market rate, and create a feedback loop that would drive up the costs continually for all Idaho families.⁴³ Even so, the Legislature poured roughly another **\$18 million** of state and federal money into the failing program in FY26.⁴⁴

The ICCP has grown to about **\$70 million** a year in expenditures, supporting our version of “quality learning centers.” This scheme is funded by the Federal Child Care Development Fund,⁴⁵ which also supported the program that was in contention in Minnesota.⁴⁶ What is even more shocking is this program has never been authorized by statute. It runs entirely on administrative rules created by the Department of Health and Welfare (DHW) and was never passed by the Legislature. The DHW’s own director conceded that “a program of this size and magnitude without a clearly defined statute is untenable.”⁴⁷

Idaho’s constitution requires all appropriations be made by law.

During the 2026 legislative session, this program came under scrutiny.⁴⁸ The DHW's solution to this issue was not to end the potentially fraud-riddled government handout, but to codify it as to remove doubts about its constitutionality. IFF led the charge to stop that from happening. We succeeded in having the FY26 and FY27 enhancements stripped. It is never the right answer to enshrine an unconstitutional government program, because rewarding the bad behavior of bureaucrats is the surest way to empower them.

THE FRUIT OF THE LUMA IS ROTTEN

When we last checked in on Luma — the state's **\$200-million-**plus financial management system — we warned that its promised savings were evaporating and the “temporary” costs of running it were quietly becoming permanent. We were right, and then some.

As the federal COVID dollars propping up Luma ran dry, the bill landed exactly where we said it would: on Idaho taxpayers. In the 2025 session alone, the Legislature moved roughly **\$14.5 million** of Luma's ongoing costs onto the state budget. This includes **\$6.8 million** from the General Fund for “computing services center” charges, another **\$5.5 million** for operating and licensing, and **\$2.2 million** to pick up seven full-time positions whose costs had been buried elsewhere.⁴⁹ These are not one-time expenses. They are the new, recurring price of a system that was supposed to *save* the state money.

But the real story is what Luma did to Idaho's books. In September 2025, the state's annual financial audit finally landed (9 months late, mind you), and it was the worst in history.⁵⁰ Auditors issued **eight qualified opinions**, something the Legislative Services Office audit division said it had never seen in more than a decade of work, along with **eleven material weaknesses** and eighteen findings in total.⁵¹

The errors were staggering: the Department of Health and Welfare's cash was overstated by **\$433.6 million**; **\$280.9 million** in SNAP benefits were simply omitted; a coding error misstated **\$359 million** in cash and liabilities; and roughly **\$545 million** in public-school payments, around a quarter of all payments, went completely unmonitored.⁵²

How does a state lose track of hundreds of millions of dollars? Auditors found that Idaho had *discontinued the routine cash-reconciliation process* between the Controller's Office, the Treasurer's Office, and the state's banks. This process had existed before the transition.

There are also concerns about the state's credit rating in the wake of the fiasco.⁵³ A system billed as a modernization has instead left Idaho in an accounting stone-age when it comes to assessing how many dollars have been spent and where.⁵⁴

URBAN RENEWAL SUBSIDIES

Urban Renewal Districts (URDs) and the urban renewal revenue allocation areas associated with them exist to divert property tax revenue from the typical functions of government to subsidize or incentivize development.

In 2026, Boise's Capital City Development Corp. (CCDC) voted to approve nearly **\$200,000** in urban renewal funds to reimburse Maverik for building a sidewalk, putting in street trees, and making upgrades to sewer and water lines for its new location on Eisenman Road.⁵⁵

Maverik is a private company owned by FJ Management, which operates more than 800 locations across 20 states.⁵⁶ Analysts estimate Maverik brings in \$1.2 billion annually.⁵⁷

It's not just CCDC spreading money around, however; the Nampa Development Corporation put **\$20,000** toward a mural by a local artist on the side of the H&M BBQ restaurant in downtown Nampa.⁵⁸ It won't be the last such expenditure, either, as the city says, "Funding of public art is one of the specific goals outlined in the 2006 Nampa Development Corporation Plan."⁵⁹

ADA COUNTY HIGHWAY DISTRICT

In late August 2026, the Ada County Highway District (ACHD) Commission voted unanimously to approve a budget of more than a **quarter billion dollars** for FY27, which includes "all available increases" in property tax revenue collection. Among the expenses funded by these tax increases is a proposed **\$5.5 million** remodel of ACHD's headquarters.⁶⁰

In September 2026, the Commission voted 5-0⁶¹ to adopt a 2027–2031 Five-Year Plan, which includes 285 projects with a total budget of **\$1.21 billion**.⁶²

SCRATCH GAMES

We have long questioned why the state is involved in gambling, and the appropriation of another **\$25,800** for computer equipment such as desktops, laptops, and Apple workstations to develop new scratch games underscores our point.⁶³ Even if this were necessary (it's not), should the state be spending more of our money to make gambling more appealing?



EDUCATION

FEDERAL PROFLIGACY CONTINUES

When it comes to exceeding the proper role of government, public universities often lead the way, and this is only exacerbated by the federal government's willingness to fund... well, almost anything. Consider the USDA's **\$2.8 billion** "Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities" program,⁶⁴ which is currently providing a five-year, **\$59 million** grant to the University of Idaho.⁶⁵

The program is listed under the "Climate Solutions" priority on the USDA website.⁶⁶ This site claims "climate change presents real threats to U.S. agricultural production, forest resources, and rural economies," and says the Department is positioning "farmers, ranchers, forest landowners, and rural communities to be leaders in emissions reductions and carbon sequestration..."

Oink!



IDAHO LAUNCH SUBSIDIZES CRONYISM

The “Idaho Launch” program was created by the Idaho Legislature in 2023 with original funding of more than **\$100 million**, and offering individual grants of up to \$8,000 to pay for education and training aligned with “in-demand” careers as determined by the Workforce Development Council.⁶⁷

An additional **\$70 - \$80 million** has been transferred into the program in each subsequent year.⁶⁸ Including transfers for FY27, Idaho taxpayers have now had more than **\$300 million** redistributed to subsidize education and training for favored industries.

MEDICAL SCHOOL SUBSIDIES

In FY26 the Legislature added roughly **\$900,000** in an ongoing General Fund for new residents and fellows scattered across Boise, Eastern Idaho, Nampa, Pocatello, Burley, and Rupert, plus a new child-psychiatry slot. In FY27 they did it again, shoveling in another **\$900,000** for six psychiatry residents in Eastern Idaho, six family-medicine residents in Nampa, three child-psychiatry residents, an added resident in Burley, and a new OB/GYN fellowship.⁶⁹ That is **\$1.8 million** in permanent new spending over two years to subsidize the training of soon-to-be six-figure professionals. This is a cost the private medical system is perfectly capable of bearing itself.

SPECIAL EDUCATION OPERATION

When Idaho Legislators meet a perceived need, their instinct is not to economize but to create a fund. In 2026, the Legislature created a brand-new “High Needs Student Fund” with **\$5 million** for FY27, funded partly by a **\$1 million raid on the Driver Training Account**, to reimburse schools for “extraordinary” special-education costs.⁷⁰ However sympathetic the cause, each new dedicated fund is a new channel of permanent spending, protected from scrutiny and nearly impossible to close once the constituency forms around it. The more sympathetic the cause, the less scrutiny and oversight.

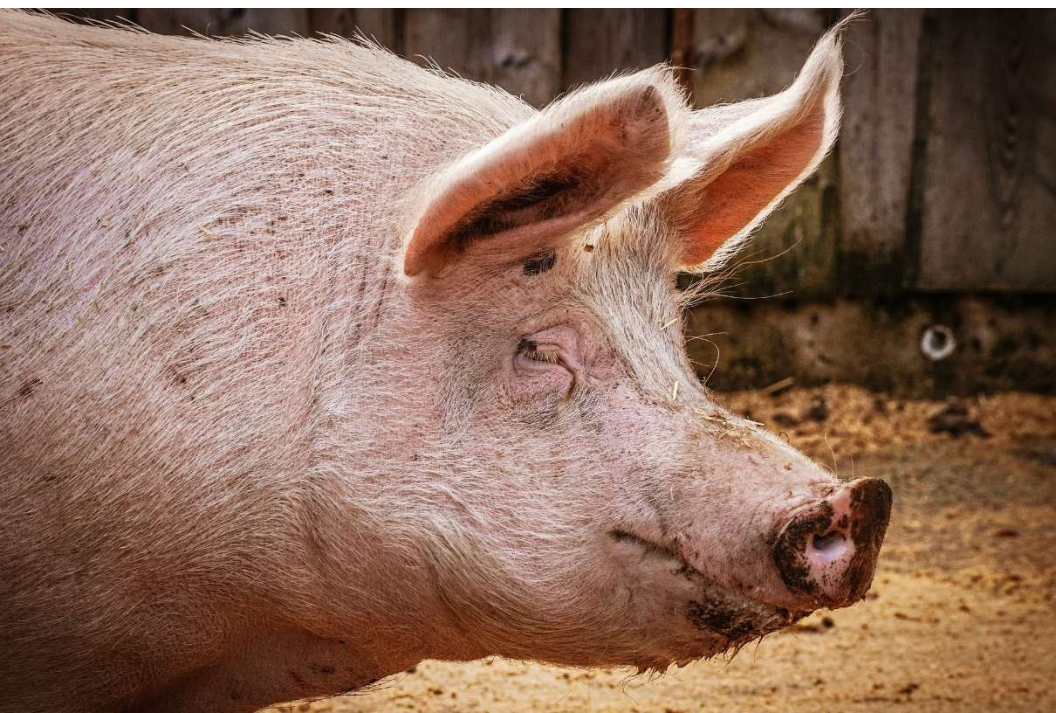
\$72 MILLION TO TEACH READING — PLUS \$5 MILLION MORE TO TEACH TEACHERS HOW TO READ

Idaho now spends **\$72.8 million every year** on “Literacy Proficiency and Interventions.”⁷¹ The goal of the program is to teach phonics — something we had figured out for centuries before forgetting it in this “enlightened” century.

This program has consumed tens of millions annually for years without producing the promised results. Naturally, the FY26 budget tacked on another **\$5 million** for “Science of Reading” professional development (mandated by Senate Bill 1069) to train teachers in how to teach reading.⁷² Maybe that should have been done first?

FEDERAL MONEY FOR “INNOVATION IN AI”

The State Board of Education was awarded a **\$4 million** federal FIPSE grant — the Fund for the Improvement of Post-secondary Education — earmarked for the “advancement of innovation in AI” in Idaho’s colleges.⁷³ Nobody knows what this means. It is academic grift-chasing at its purest: a large sum of federal grant money attached to the buzzword of the moment, accepted because it is “free,” and carrying the usual federal strings that will probably outlast the check.



HEALTHCARE

MEDICAID (BUDGET) EXPANSION

When it comes to spending, Medicaid remains one of the state's largest appropriations, exploding from **\$2.23 billion** in FY17⁷⁴ to **\$5.48 billion** for FY27.⁷⁵

A large part of this massive increase is because of Medicaid Expansion (the cost of which will exceed **\$1.3 billion** in FY27⁷⁶), adopted through a ballot initiative in 2018.⁷⁷ This initiative expanded a program originally created to serve a needy subset of the population to provide socialized medicine to hundreds of thousands of able-bodied adults.

THAT'S SOME (EVEN MORE) EXPENSIVE SOFTWARE

In 2023, the Legislature passed Senate Bill 1097 to create a fund for a new Medicaid Management Information System (MMIS) — the software that processes Idaho's Medicaid claims — with an estimated price tag of nearly **\$187 million**.⁷⁸ As with most government contracting, that was only the start of the saga.

In the 2026 session, lawmakers appropriated another **\$102.7 million** for "Year 4" of the five-year procurement.⁷⁹ But the money is only half the story. The procurement itself has become a legal and ethical morass.

Rather than run its own competitive bid, the state used a “cooperative purchasing agreement.” This works by borrowing a similar bid, in this case *Montana’s* bid, and handing the results to a new vendor, Acentra Health. However, a lawsuit alleges that the contract was awarded using a practice the Idaho Legislature repealed in 2024.

The incumbent contractor, Gainwell Technologies, sued in August 2025, alleging the state “repeatedly changed the rules for the contract award through a noncompetitive bidding process.” In March 2026, a judge issued a temporary restraining order, freezing the whole thing. The fallout, in the words of Idaho’s own Medicaid administrator: the state has “eaten away” its schedule buffer and must now push its comprehensive managed-care transition back “by a full calendar year,” to 2030.⁸⁰

So, Idaho is spending nine figures on a claims system that moves more than **\$300 million a month**, using a procurement method its own Legislature tried to outlaw, and it has bought itself a lawsuit and a year of delay in the bargain. Tremendous work.

“YOUR HEALTH IDAHO”

As part of the “Obamacare” socialized medicine rollout, Idaho created “Your Health Idaho,” an online “marketplace” for subsidized health insurance. This program received more than **\$100 million** in initial funding, most of it from the federal government.⁸¹

More than **\$10 million** of this was spent on advertising. Incredibly, tens of millions were spent on the design, development, implementation, and maintenance of what is essentially no more than a website and database.⁸²

All told, this socialized medicine portal has facilitated more than **\$4 billion** in redistribution since its inception, with recent estimates at more than half a billion per year ongoing.⁸³

ADVERTISING HEALTH AND WELFARE

On the subject of advertising, the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare spent nearly **\$400,000** on promotion and publicity (including billboards and radio advertising) in 2025 and the first half of 2026.⁸⁴

More than **\$16,000** of the total was spent on ads published in the Spanish language “Buena Vista Guide” including a full-page ad listing the state’s public health districts.⁸⁵

More than **\$220,000** was spent by the Department on promotion and publicity related to the “Youth Safety and Permanency” program expanded by Senate Bill 1208 (2025, **\$21.2 million** enhancement appropriation), which received an Idaho Spending Index rating of (-3).⁸⁶ This includes more than **\$55,000** spent to advertise 63 new full-time positions related to the program.

LONG COVID (SPENDING)

The COVID-19 pandemic ended years ago, but the spending has not. It seems the government has caught a case of long COVID when it comes to spending.



The Department of Health and Welfare appropriated **\$6.1 million** in “ARPA multi-year programs” in FY26 and another **\$6.5 million** in “ARPA-funded multi-year grants” in FY27.⁸⁷

These federal pandemic dollars — which the Legislature acknowledged were borrowed from our grandchildren — are still being handed out like candy for open-ended commitments like a Rural Nursing Loan Repayment program. The Commission on Aging shoveled out another **\$500,000** of leftover ARPA money as subgrants, and the Department of Environmental Quality still runs tens of millions in ARPA “reimbursements” through its books.⁸⁸

“Temporary” relief has a way of turning into a permanent obligation. As the old saying goes, nothing is so permanent as a temporary government program.

DRUGS ARE BAD, FOLKS

In 2024 we noted that the Idaho State Police had spent more than **half a million dollars** over two years promoting “fentanyl awareness,” and asked the obvious question: isn’t everyone aware of fentanyl at this point? Never fear, even more ad spending is here.

The 2025 session approved another **\$500,000** for the Governor's "Fentanyl Takes All" campaign, drawn from **opioid-settlement funds** meant for treatment and recovery, not marketing. The campaign ran through a Boise ad firm that proudly racked up more than **60 million ad impressions**, roughly 32 for every Idahoan.⁸⁹

Then the 2026 session went bigger still: the Office of Drug Policy collected another **\$5 million** from the Millennium Fund for a statewide "drug awareness" media campaign.⁹⁰ This is exactly the kind of feel good we-are-doing-something "awareness" spending that never seems to end.

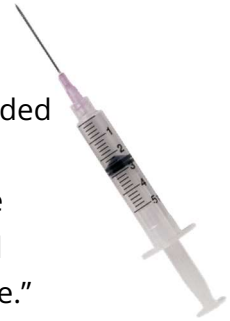
A HIDDEN TAX FOR "FREE" VACCINES

In 2024 we flagged House Bill 439, which extended the sunset date of the Idaho Immunization Assessment Board for another five years.⁹¹ The board oversees a program that buys childhood vaccines and hands them to physicians "for free."

In government parlance, this means someone else is paying.

The program is financed by a mandatory *assessment* levied on the insurance carriers and plan sponsors that cover Idaho children. A tax, for all intents and purposes. Each year the state tallies up the expected cost of vaccine purchases and divides it among "program-eligible" children to set a per-child charge (roughly \$62 per child in a recent year).⁹²

These costs have to be made up somewhere, so of course they flow straight back to Idahoans through higher insurance premiums.



In the 2026 session, the Legislature restored **\$28 million** to the immunization assessment fund — a stark reminder of just how large this compulsory, government-run purchasing scheme has become. Freedom doesn't come free, and neither do vaccines.

GOVERNMENT JOB CREATION

Buried in the Department of Health and Welfare budget is a single line adding **36 new full-time positions** and **\$3 million** for a “prevention specialist team.”⁹³ Thirty-six permanent government salaries, all with benefits, PERSI contributions, and annual raises attached, created in one stroke. The costs over time will be enormous, but by then they will long be forgotten and become just another part of the base budget.

TRANSFORMING TAX DOLLARS

The Rural Health Transformation Fund is the single largest new item in the budget: **\$295.4 million** in FY27 alone, part of nearly **\$1 billion** in federal debt over five years.⁹⁴ But do not fear, an oversight committee has been established. So far, they have overseen the transformation of your tax dollars into waste.

As is tradition, money must first be spent on the people spending the money. The plan carves out **\$1.3 million** for “project management,” **\$2 million** for a performance dashboard, **\$2 million** to oversee facility renovations, and **\$800,000** just to hand out **\$66 million** in workforce incentives. This is against a mere \$1.2 million and \$2.4 million for actual obstetric and perinatal care.⁹⁵

Compliance with federal reporting requirements and project management contracts always come before getting anything useful out of government spending. Expect this program to do little to transform rural health and a lot to transform tax dollars into cushy government contracts.



TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE

THE PERMANENT SPENDING FUND

The Permanent Building Fund bankrolls the state's endless appetite for new buildings. It is mostly financed by a surcharge on Idahoans' income-tax returns and a slice of the cigarette tax.⁹⁶

It paid out **\$122.9 million** in FY26, **\$72.5 million** in FY27 in on-books spending.⁹⁷



The FY26 projects included: **\$14 million** for an ISU Life Sciences Complex, **\$8 million** for a U of I Joint Military Science and Veterans' center, **\$6.5 million** to expand a Department of Lands office, and **\$5.56 million** *just to run utilities* to a future Bonneville readiness center. The design costs also incurred another **\$890,100** in FY27. Don't forget **\$5.5 million** for a State Police facility in Lewiston, and **\$2.5 million** for more Micron labs at Boise State, among others.⁹⁸

On top sits a continuous stream of "alteration and repair" and "building maintenance." These amounted to another **\$68.2 million in FY26 and \$71.6 million in FY27**, including **\$2 million** a year to maintain the Capitol Mall and Chinden Campus.⁹⁹

MOVING THE GOALPOSTS ON STATE STREET

In 2024 we chronicled the fight over the Idaho Transportation Department's prime 44-acre campus at 3311 W. State Street which was flood-damaged and rendered uninhabitable. In the aftermath, developers offered more than **\$50 million** for the riverfront parcel. Instead, the Legislature blocked that sale, with some lawmakers insisting a renovation would "better serve taxpayers."¹⁰⁰ The taxpayers are likely to disagree.



Rather than sell a vacant, asbestos-contaminated building for a substantial sum, the state has chosen to *spend* a far larger sum fixing it up. The Legislature, caught up in its internal squabbling, often makes poor financial decisions based on politics rather than what is good for citizens.

Accordingly, the 2024 session put in **\$32.5 million**, and the 2025 session added another **\$9.6 million**, bringing legislative funding to **\$42.1 million**. Yet the renovation estimate has already ballooned to between **\$64 million and \$69.4 million**, a shortfall of **\$22 to \$27 million**, with **\$8.2 million** of that going just to abate hazardous materials before the real work can even begin.¹⁰¹

The remodel is expected to take several years, after which headquarters staff now parked at the Chinden Campus will move back. It is notable that the Chinden Campus already has many vacancies. But it seems the government has a penchant for vacant offices.

WASTE WATER

There may be a drought in Idaho, but not when it comes to spending tax dollars. In FY26 the Legislature gave the Department of Water Resources a **\$36 million General Fund Package** for



water projects and aquifer recharge.¹⁰² This is no one-time transfer, the money is now transferred on an ongoing basis and was rolled into the base budget for FY27.

This **\$36 million** injection grew ongoing General Fund spending by 259%, permanently. This is not to mention the hundreds of millions given away during COVID and additional federal support, tens of millions of which are still waiting for disbursement or allocation.¹⁰³ With the Board allocating the funds, it's politicians who get to pick winners and losers.

Further, Idaho already finances water infrastructure through loans. The Water Resource Board's Water Project Loan Program lends to irrigation districts and municipalities and is repaid with interest (prime rate), which recycles the money to lend again.¹⁰⁴

This is at least a self-sustaining model that requires infrastructure to eventually pay for itself. The Department of Environmental Quality's revolving funds work in much the same manner. The General Fund payments are a permanent handout, not an investment.

“DEI FOR INTERNET”

The 2024 report flagged the Digital Access for All Idahoans program, which was buried in the Commission for Libraries’ budget, as a type of “DEI for Internet.” This is a federally funded scheme to subsidize “affordable internet” for favored groups, part of the Biden-era Digital Equity Act. We argued it propped up an industry the free market already serves. It turns out even Washington eventually agreed.

In 2025, the Trump administration **terminated the Digital Equity Act grant programs** outright, and Idaho **forfeited its full \$6.3 million** five-year allocation.¹⁰⁵ That is the good news. The bad news is what happened first: in the 2025 session the Legislature appropriated another **\$1.23 million** in federal authority for the program, and in February 2025 the Commission for Libraries had already shoveled **\$2.3 million** out the door to 29 sub-grantees, complete with plans for taxpayer-funded “digital navigators” to hand out laptops.¹⁰⁶

In other words, the federal government canceled the program as a boondoggle, but only after Idaho bureaucrats had spent millions that will never come back. The lesson is not that the program was stopped, but rather the cavalier attitude bureaucrats have spending “free” federal dollars (paid by you) on projects they ostensibly oppose.



AND THE REST!

LOCAL JOB, STATE SPENDING

Cleaning up a hazardous materials spill has always been a local job. Fire departments handle it, and incidents are sometimes reimbursed by the state to help cover costs. In FY25 these costs amounted to **\$34,200**. In FY26, the Legislature decided to turn it into a **\$17.2 million dollar** program.¹⁰⁷

The Military Division's budget now includes this Governor's initiative, paid from the Miscellaneous Revenue Fund, to send grants, equipment, and training to regional hazardous materials response teams around the state. That is not reimbursement for incidents that actually happened. It is a standing subsidy for a service local departments already provide.

Nothing about hazardous materials response has gotten over 500 times more expensive.

The government simply had extra revenue and found a new place to spend it rather than returning it to the taxpayers.

ENVIRONMENTAL LACKEYS

This description comes from the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality's website:



“DEQ implements state environmental programs

pursuant to state laws and rules. In general, Idaho’s environmental programs meet the requirements of the major federal environmental protection laws, ... DEQ is authorized to administer state programs in lieu of the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) administering these federal acts.”¹⁰⁸

That’s right, Idaho’s DEQ does the work of the federal government to administer and enforce its federal laws. The federal government sends Idaho a “check” to do the fed’s work, but Idaho also ponies up **\$49,581,400** of our own state money to bring the grand total to **\$97,722,100**.¹⁰⁹

We say, if the feds want to make the rules, let them bear the cost and burden of enforcement.

KAMIAH EARMARK

The Legislature directed **\$150,000** in ongoing Millennium-Fund money to a single named nonprofit, the Upriver Youth Leadership Council Recovery Center in the town of Kamiah.¹¹⁰ A recurring, line-item earmark to one specific organization in one specific town is the textbook definition of a legislative pet project, and it commits the state to funding it indefinitely.

THE RATCHET OF “RESTORATION”

Watch how Idaho’s budget defies logic — it’s cut every year, and yet it’s still growing. In FY27 the



Legislature spent **\$28.6 million** — **\$8 million** from dedicated funds and **\$20.5 million** federal — to “restore” Assertive Community Treatment and peer-support services that had been trimmed the year before.¹¹¹ These were all cobbled together from a hodgepodge of salary savings, opioid-settlement money, and federal matching funds.

This is the magic of legislative accounting at work: cut a program in one bill to claim the mantle of fiscal responsibility, quietly restore it in the next, and ensure nothing is ever actually reduced. A cut that is reversed the next session is not really a cut at all.

GRANTS TO HAND-PICKED NONPROFITS

The FY27 budget parceled out **\$3 million** in one-time spending from the Millennium Fund to ten named children’s advocacy centers.¹¹²

Whatever the merit of the work, ***hand-selecting specific nonprofits for state grants is charity with other people’s money***, something the government specializes in. Not to mention it turns ostensibly private organizations into permanent supplicants at the feet of the government, back every session for the appropriation they have become dependent on.

THE PILOT THAT WILL NEVER LAND

The Idaho State Police picked up **\$551,500** in federal funds for a new “Mobile Livescan” fingerprinting pilot.¹¹³ Pilot programs are the first step in birthing a new permanent program. Launch it on “free” federal money, build an operation and expectation around it, and when the federal dollars run out, present the state with an offer it can no longer refuse. At least surrendering your fingerprint to the government will be convenient.

THE \$5,600 MOBILE MUSEUM

A picture of government waste is worth a thousand words? The budget found **\$5,600** for an “Idaho Mobile Museum.”¹¹⁴ It is a rounding error in a **\$14 billion** budget, which is precisely why it exists. When the government believes no program is too niche and no sum too small to consume tax dollars, the culture of big government spending has won. The dollars here are almost immaterial, however the mindset is indicative of the people in our government.

DOGE: ALL BARK, NO BITE

Idaho’s answer to government waste is always to create another committee. The Legislature’s interim DOGE Task Force promised to examine unnecessary agencies, positions, and travel expenses. IFF supplied a roadmap identifying **\$2.146 billion** in potential state and federal spending reductions, nearly all of it recurring spending.¹¹⁵ There was no shortage of places to start.



What did taxpayers get? A measly consolidation of the STEM Action Center into the Workforce Development Council. Appropriations declined marginally, but six positions and approximately **\$3 million** in ongoing General Fund spending moved with the programs.¹¹⁶ Even this accomplishment largely preserved the activities taxpayers were already financing. Moving bureaucracy around is hardly the sweeping reduction in government Idahoans were promised.

Meanwhile, Idaho Launch, the Commission for Libraries, the Commission on Aging, and countless other bureaucratic agencies and government handouts remain fully funded. Even efforts to eliminate or defund the DEI Commission on Hispanic Affairs failed to clear House committees. The Committee's biggest accomplishment was cleaning up stale references in Idaho law.

This exercise in futility, does however, cost money. Ironically, taxpayers finance legislators' travel and interim legislative expenses through the legislative account. We pay politicians to discuss saving money while the programs identified for elimination continue to grind along.

This is the systemic problem with interim committees: holding meetings becomes the end in and of itself. Idaho desperately needs legislators willing to end unnecessary spending. Another committee meeting cannot be allowed to become a substitute for that willingness.

STUBBORNNESS WASTES THOUSANDS

Last year, Bonneville County charged an Idaho Falls attorney \$352 for electronic copies of court records. This charge was excessive, but the county stubbornly chose to defend its mistake rather than correct it. The Idaho Supreme Court unanimously agreed that the charges violated Idaho law and ordered the county to repay \$331 plus **\$1,241.80** in court costs.¹¹⁷

But that's not all. Bonneville County paid the Nelson Hall Parry Tucker law firm **\$3,632** in outside attorney fees to defend the unlawful charges. And that's in addition to the salaries, benefits, staff time, and overhead dedicated to the case by the County Prosecutor's Office. These additional costs could easily exceed **\$20,000** in the private sector.¹¹⁸

COURT TECHNOLOGY FUND

The Judicial Branch secured a **\$2 million** ongoing increase to its Court Technology Fund, plus **\$700,000** one-time for drug, mental-health, and family courts.¹¹⁹ Court technology, like all government technology, only seems to cost more and never delivers the promised efficiencies that were used to justify the last technology overhaul. Always just out of reach!



FISCAL FOLLOW-UP

IDAHO RURAL PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

In IFF's 2024 edition of the Pork Report, we reported on the **\$116,900** the Legislature appropriated to the Idaho Rural Partnership Program. In 2026, the Legislature did not specifically approve ongoing spending for the program, rather, they approved spending authority for a staggering **\$186 million** first-year federal allocation under the Rural Health Transformation Program.¹²⁰

DHW INTRUSIONS

The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare's Maternal, Infant, and Early Child Home Visiting Program continues to receive **\$3.2 million** in federal funding.¹²¹

FISH & GAME

IFF reported in 2024 the Idaho Department of Fish and Game was appropriated **\$3 million** for facility expansion in Pocatello. In 2025, the Legislature gave the Department reappropriation authority through Senate Bill 1217, allowing unexpected balances from 2025 to carry over to FY2026.¹²² It seems this was specifically done for the Pocatello facility remodel.

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I WANT TO EXPOSE THE WASTE!

The 2026 Idaho Report on Government Waste documents more than **\$2 billion** in what Idaho Freedom Foundation identifies as waste, misuse, excessive spending, and government inefficiency across state and local government. This report includes costly technology projects, rapidly expanding programs, questionable subsidies, invasive surveillance systems, bureaucratic growth, and recurring expenditures that place an increasing burden on taxpayers. Supporting IFF means helping fund the research, public education, and legislative work required to expose waste before it becomes permanent, challenge unnecessary government growth, and defend a culture of limited government and individual liberty in Idaho.

**I want to support Idaho Freedom Foundation's work
exposing government waste with a gift of:**

☐ **\$500**

☐ **\$250**

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