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Idaho FY22: Recommendations, Appropriations, and Partisanship

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Abstract

This paper presents an overview of the State of Idaho’s FY 2022 budget recommendations and appropriations in the context of demographic changes, economic conditions, and politics. The Executive Budget for FY 2022 notes Governor Little’s historical support of education, job growth, economic opportunity, and fostering an environment for Idaho to avoid citizen migration to other states. However, this policy, along with the COVID-19 exodus, has resulted in a large influx of people from other states with the commensurate housing and infrastructure demands. As most Idaho budgets tend to move incrementally in support of education and infrastructure in the context of very healthy revenues, the state is likely to weather, though with some ambivalence, economic fluctuations. However, partisan tensions threaten education and safety net programming.

Keywords: public budgeting, state governments, public management

Introduction

The Idaho Governor, Brad Little, launched the 2021 legislative session with several goals that mirrored those of the previous decade. These included calls for investment in education and public health, transparency in government, support for economic stimulus and infrastructure investment, and the annual call for tax cuts. In his 2021 *State of the State and Budget Address*, the Governor offered the following statement:

While other states face potential budget cuts of 20- to 40-percent and more, Idaho is in the enviable position of having a record budget surplus. . . I’m proposing a “no frills” budget for Fiscal Year 2022. My budget leaves a prudent surplus, bolsters rainy-day funds, and reflects my continued priority on education,

including our valuable teachers . . . The ongoing growth in the state budget — just 3.8-percent — is among the most conservative in years. Our commitment to conservative budgeting — and quick action during the pandemic — are the reasons Idaho is excelling while other states' economies and state budgets are pummeled. Let's continue to live within our means and make investments where they count.

When the session began in January 2021, the Governor's recommendations were made in the context of a modest 3.5% projected increase in revenue from 2020 actual general fund revenue receipts (generally comprised of sales, corporate income, and individual income taxes). The session resulted in an overall percentage increase from the FY21 general fund budget of 9.9%. By the end of 2021, actual revenue from tax collections was 24.2%, bolstered in large part by corporations. This occurred despite reduced corporate and individual income tax rates and restructured individual tax brackets. The surplus prompted healthy deposits in the rainy-day funds bringing the total in reserve funds to \$849.3 million (Legislative Services Office, 2021b, p. 49). In the fiscally conservative state of Idaho, tax cuts are always popular. The surplus for the FY22 budget allowed a cut of an estimated \$204.7 million, as well as \$706,294 in rebates that were distributed in the beginning of August in 2021 to those who filed tax returns in 2019 and 2020 (Idaho Tax Commission (2022, p. 3). More specific discussion of the implications of the 2021 general fund surplus, tax rebates and cuts, and agency expenditures authorized for FY22 follow a brief discussion of the socio-economic, political and geographic context of Idaho

Socio-Economic and Political Context

The demographic composition of a state is highly correlated to its capacity to finance public service delivery. Table 1 summarizes selected demographics for the State of Idaho; Idaho's median and per capita income are below the national statistics. Fewer people have bachelor's degrees, but a larger percentage do have high school diplomas. The gender statistics are flipped between the U.S. and Idaho. The state is still predominantly white, but not Hispanic at 81.6%. That statistic has shifted down in recent years and we are seeing growth in the number of residents who designate Hispanic ethnicity. The most 'diverse' region of the state is in the southern portion of the state, especially in Ada and Canyon counties, collectively known as the Treasure Valley. This region, surrounding the state capital of Boise, is the largest metro area. Idaho is not a densely populated state; however, the tensions between rural and urban areas are increasing, and we see this played out in the legislature.

Table 1: Selected Idaho 2021 Demographics

		US	Idaho
Median Household income		\$67,521	\$55,785
Per Capita Income (\$)		\$34,103	\$27,970
% of Persons in Poverty		11.4%	11.2%
Education, 25yr+			
	High School	88.0%	90.8%
	Bachelors	32.1%	27.6%
Gender			
	Female	50.8%	49.9%
Ethnicity or Race			
	White alone, not Hispanic	60.1%	81.6%
	Black alone	13.4%	0.9%
	American Indian alone	1.3%	1.7%
	Hispanic	18.5%	12.8%
<p>U.S. Census (August 25, 2021, retrieved 11/19/21). <i>Idaho: 2020 Census</i> https://www.census.gov/library/stories/state-by-state/idaho-population-change-between-census-decade.html</p> <p>U.S. Census (July 1, 2019, retrieved 11/20/21). <i>Quick Facts: US/Idaho</i> https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045219</p>			

While the COVID-19 exodus from other states is definitely showing up in Idaho, this is not a new situation. As Table 2 demonstrates, population growth has dominated the policy landscape with a 42% increase in population between 2000 and 2020. The proportion of people under the age of 18 is decreasing, but the shifts are not evenly distributed throughout the state. Schools in the growing urban areas are overfilled, and schools in rural areas often see a decline in enrollment. Urban districts are packed and those in rural areas often see declining enrollment; this has implications for education funding that is based upon enrollment. Despite the dramatic increase in housing prices, and the presumed increase in property taxes that might follow, local governments and school districts are facing budget challenges as growth outpaces infrastructure. This has been the case for the past two decades.

Table 2: Idaho Population Growth

	2000	2010	2020
Total Population	1,293,953	1,567,582	1,839,106
% Population over 18	71.5%	72.6%	74.8%
42.1% growth in total population between 2000 and 2020			
U.S. Census (August 25, 2021, retrieved 11/19/21). <i>Idaho: 2020 Census</i> https://www.census.gov/library/stories/state-by-state/idaho-population-change-between-census-decade.html			
U.S. Census (2000, 2010, retrieved 1/27/22) publications CPH-1 and DP-1. https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/decade/decennial-publications.2000.html			

When the State of Idaho has been referenced in the past on the national stage, it has been due to raging wildfires, severe weather, and even potatoes. More recently, the state is featured in national news because of commentary from a handful of elected officials who have been considerably vocal about their beliefs. These beliefs include wanting to return to a time where women were discouraged from obtaining an education or working from outside the home. Additional commentary supports mandating that the history of this country taught to children includes little reference to the realities of racism, genocide, and police violence.

In 2000, conservatism in state elected positions usually emphasized fiscal policies. Governor Little’s opening statement for the 2021 legislative session captured the cautious spending logic that had traditionally been the banner of the Republican party in Idaho. Republicans have dominated state government for more than two decades. For example, in 2000, the Idaho House of Representatives held 58 Republicans and 12 Democrats, while 31 Republicans and 4 Democrats were in the Idaho Senate. In 2020, this party distribution has not changed dramatically with the same 58/12 distribution in the House of Representatives, but there was a small shift in the Senate with the Democrats gaining three seats. However, simply counting party

affiliation does not tell us much about the character of the policy discussions. Tensions within the Republican party, fueled in part by divisive political rhetoric on the national level and the urban/rural discord prompted by growth and revenue distribution, are playing out in the budget.

Idaho Tends to be an Outlier in the West

It is useful to consider the context of the Idaho budget as compared to other western states. For example, the population of California (~39.5 million) is twenty-one times that of Idaho (~1.8 million) (U.S. Census). General fund spending for California (~175 billion) is nearly thirty-nine times that of Idaho (~4.2 billion) (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2021). Furthermore, less than half of the funding used by Idaho in the aggregate budget (~37.5%) comes from sales and income (either individual or corporate) taxes, product taxes, or miscellaneous revenue such as permits, lease payments, or licensing. The remainder is drawn from federal sources (~44.5%) and dedicated funds (~18.0% specifically appropriated and defined by source and recipient agency). The theoretically discretionary nature of the general fund is the focus of executive agencies' requests. The Governor recommends expenditures be subject to action by the legislature in the standard appropriation process. Although the legislature has the ability to change sources and distributions in the dedicated fields, that is unusual. And, while it has occurred when policies such as funding for childcare support become politicized, the state doesn't generally refuse federal funds. Thus, the variation in the request, recommend and appropriation cycle usually refer to shifts in general fund revenue and distribution. Notably, the general fund has more than doubled since FY 2000 from \$1,708.4 million to \$5,171 million projected for FY22.

Table 3. Idaho General Fund Major Components and Total Revenue (\$ in millions)

Fiscal Year	Total		Individual Income		Corporate Income		Sales	
	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%
2007 Actual	2,813	15.7	1,400	15.1	190	(2.0)	1,078	22.3
2008 Actual	2,908	3.4	1,430	2.1	189	(0.5)	1,141	5.9
2009 Actual	2,466	(15.2)	1,168	(18.3)	141	(25.5)	1,022	(10.4)
2010 Actual	2,265	(8.2)	1,062	(9.1)	097	(31.2)	956	(6.5)
2011 Actual	2,444	7.9	1,153	8.5	169	74.1	972	1.7
2012 Actual	2,588	5.9	1,206	4.7	187	10.7	1,027	5.7
2013 Actual	2,751	6.3	1,284	6.5	198	6.2	1,110	8.0
2014 Actual	2,815	2.4	1,329	3.5	188	(5.2)	1,146	3.2
2015 Actual	3,057	8.6	1,471	10.7	215	14.4	1,219	6.4
2016 Actual	3,184	4.2	1,513	2.9	187	(13.2)	1,303	6.9
2017 Actual	3,448	8.3	1,651	9.1	214	14.5	1,382	6.1
2018 Actual	3,732	5.3	1,828	10.7	239	11.5	1,490	7.8
2019 Actual	3,735	0.1	1,661	(9.1)	283	18.6	1,598	7.2
2020 Actual	4,032	8.0	1,905	14.7	243	(14.1)	1,689	5.7
2021 Actual	5,009	24.2	2,446	28.4	349	43.2	2,160	18.6
2022 Original Forecast	4,402	3.5	2,089	5.7	261	~0	1,866	1.6
Forecast for 2022 revised in Fall 2021	5,171	3.2	2,282	(6.7)	393	12.7	2,160	7.8
<p>Sources: Division of Financial Management (section A-7) <i>FY2022 Executive Budget General Fund Revenue History & Forecast</i>. Boise, ID: Division of Financial Management. Division of Financial Management (section A-2) <i>FY2023 Executive Budget General Fund Revenue History & Forecast</i>. Boise, ID: Division of Financial Management. Legislative Services Office. (2021, 29). <i>FY22 Idaho Legislative Fiscal Report</i>. Boise, ID: Idaho State Legislature.</p> <p>Note: The percentages are the differences from the previous fiscal year (decreases in parentheses). The total general fund also includes miscellaneous taxes and user fees and is usually lumped into 'other taxes' for reporting.</p>								

As illustrated in Table 3, Idaho's revenue growth from individual and corporate income tax and sales tax have been mostly positive with percentage declines registered in 2009 and 2010. Changing tax policies in the state associated with isolated shifts in corporate income tax revenue (see 2014, 2016, and 2020) and individual income tax (2019). Actual 2020 general fund revenue from sales and income tax increased by 8% from 2019. The 2021 and 2022 forecasts were for growth as well at a rate of 5.5% and 3.5%, respectively. However, actual general fund revenue was \$5,009, resulting in another surplus, almost three-quarters of a million dollars in tax rebates, more than two million in tax cuts, and the highest rainy-day funds on record in a state that prides itself on saving.

2021 Legislative Session and the FY22 Budget

Idaho's budget is quite small compared to larger western states to its south, east, and west. Stewardship of the modest resources available to the state is taken quite seriously in this generally conservative state. Led by the Joint Finance and Appropriation Committee, the legislature tends to make small adjustments to recommendations by the executive. Agency requests continue to reflect one-time expenses to address infrastructure investment in technology and funding to address service demands. Thus, as the Governor noted in his 2021 address to the legislature, regardless of any surplus, the growth rate of the budget itself (including federal and dedicated funds) reflects the general culture of 'saving for a rainy day' and reducing taxes as a possibility. Prudent spending in areas of practical consideration like infrastructure and education comprises Governor Little's unofficial mantra as it did his predecessors, Dirk Kempthorne and Butch Otter.

Table 4. APPROPRIATIONS BY FUNCTIONAL AREA
FY22 Governor’s Recommendation compared to FY22 Appropriation (with Appropriation percentage change from FY21 to FY22)

(\$ in millions)	General Fund			All Funds		
	FY22 REC \$	FY22 APP \$	% change APP prior year	FY22 REC \$	FY22 APP \$	% change APP prior year
Statewide	4,215.30	4,222.57	9.9	9,907.93	11,271.46	3.5
Education	2,608.00	2,613.50	9.1	8,415.40	4,088.49	16.1
Health & Human Services	965.57	962.96	14.6	4,204.46	4,630.86	11.8
Law & Justice	413.11	414.76	7.0	532.63	534.22	4.7
Natural Resources	52.93	53.61	8.9	341.17	342.93	(0.1)
Economic Development	45.99	46.08	2.8	1,020.48	1,214.96	(19.2)
General Government	129.33	131.67	5.4	393.79	460.01	(47.2)
Sources: Legislative Services Office. (2020, 18, 20). <i>FY22 Idaho Legislative Budget Book</i> . Boise, ID: Idaho State Legislature. Legislative Services Office. (2021, 36, 37). <i>FY22 Idaho Legislative Fiscal Report</i> . Boise, ID: Idaho State Legislature.						

Generally, neither the Governor nor the legislature veer too far from the agency requests. For example, the request from the general fund, compared to actual FY22 appropriation, increased slightly statewide in aggregate with only slight decreases from request to eventual appropriation in Health and Human Services, Law and Justice, and Economic Development. Interestingly, when federal and dedicated funds are added to the mix, appropriation exceeded agency requests in all functional areas.

The percentage change columns reflect the difference between the FY21 total appropriation and the FY22 appropriation by functional area. Overall, the general fund appropriation increased between FY21 and FY22 by 9.9% reflecting change for each function area ranging from a low of 2.8% for Economic Development to a high of 14.6% for Health and Human Services. When all funds are considered, the percentage overall change between FY21 and FY22 appropriation was still positive at 3.5%, but some functional areas saw sharp decreases between appropriations for FY21 to FY22. However, targeted, line-item decreases did occur due to ideological disputes.

The Governor's recommendations and the eventual legislative appropriations are detailed in Table 4. While these exceeded agency request for FY22 in aggregate, they show variation by functional area with recommendations less than requests for all functional areas except for Education and General Government. The total FY22 all funds appropriation exceeded the government recommendation in all functional areas. The percentage change in appropriation from FY21 to FY22 is repeated in Table 3 to demonstrate the contrast between governor recommendations and the ultimate appropriation by the legislature.

Education is the second largest functional expense area in the Idaho budget (behind Health and Human Services). Governor Little focused heavily on education in FY21, and this functional area continues to be important in FY22. The Governor indicated that his priorities favored K-12 education, funding to support professional development for teachers, salary increases for administrators and classified staff, increased health insurance funding for schools, and learning loss related to the COVID-19 pandemic, among other initiatives (Legislative Services Office 2021b). The Governor also recommended investment in higher education in programs such as zero-cost textbook programs and enhanced collaborations between universities for economies of scale (Little 2021a). The FY22 budget implements advanced professional rung compensation for teachers and additional investments in career technical education. One of the highest priorities was an investment in public school support, with an increase from FY21 of 9.2% in the general fund and 31.6% in all funds respectively.

Like spending on education, health and human services are generally supported to a greater proportion using federal and dedicated funds rather than the general fund. Governor Little did recommend a new investment for public health initiatives in response to COVID-19 using federal monies. Enhancements in appropriations for FY22 generally focused on child welfare foster and assistance payment programs, behavior health, COVID-19 vaccine related activities, domestic violence, and childcare support (Legislative Services Office 2021b).

Most funding for law and justice is from the general fund rather than from dedicated funds or from the federal government. Population growth, especially in Ada and Canyon counties in the southwest part of the state, was the justification for the FY22 focus on increasing organizational and physical capacity, operation costs, updating management software, and increasing compensation (Legislative Services Office 2021b). Conversely, most of the funding for the natural resources category of the budget comes from dedicated funding (fees, permits, and licensure) and from the federal government.

In general, economic development is an important budget category for the Governor's priorities. Little's focus is on infrastructure such as highway and rail systems and community airport improvements, attracting and retaining businesses in Idaho, as well as catalyzing tourism in the area. Additionally, recognizing the population growth, a response to the COVID-19 related exodus from cities and populous states, the Governor is a supporter of additional funding for civic infrastructure projects to improve drinking water, wastewater management, and related agricultural activities. Significantly, he is especially interested in investments in broadband generally and with targeted improvements for rural areas (Little 2021a). Concerns about the economic impact of COVID-19 did not translate to legislative appropriation of the full \$5.2 billion dollars in funding to Idaho through the American Rescue Plan Act (Legislative Fiscal Report for FY22, p. 7). Of this, the legislature has, to date, appropriated a bit more than \$780 million for FY22.

Most of the budget for the Secretary of State, the Lieutenant Governor, the Attorney General, and the legislative branch come from general funds. However, a substantial proportion of the Governor's budget, the Department of Administration, and the State Controller are derived from either federal or dedicated funding.

Budget-Related Happenings in the Legislature

As noted earlier in the brief discussion on demographics and political change, the state has long been dominated by the Republican party. This has translated to conservative fiscal policies. So, it is not surprising that revenue estimates are cautious, and spending does not vary dramatically from year to year'. For decades, Idaho conservatism has usually been captured as fiscal conservatism. However, while the 2021 Idaho legislature was predominantly Republican, it was not a unified party. The discord in the party was partly due to a shift to libertarian ideology rather than traditional fiscal conservatism. This conflict was also exacerbated by high profile attacks on education to eliminate the claimed threat of indoctrination in schools, incivility between members of the house, and various ethical violations including publicizing information about a rape victim and a failure to meet transparency and open records standards.

The Idaho Freedom Foundation (IFF) is a self-reported think tank that distributes unabashedly libertarian positions that are either a form of education or lobbying depending upon the observer. Although they indicate that they do not endorse candidates, they do score legislators on indexes regarding whether the positions held by senators or representatives support significantly reducing government at all levels, most especially in support of IFF positions. These positions include removing government regulation and sponsorship of all types, including removing the public sector from education policy and delivery, as well as reducing taxes and fees imposed by local and state governments. Seated representatives and senators, as well as those in statewide office have weaponized these indices as evidence of 'conservatism'.

The ideological crosscurrents in the legislature have implications for revenue generation and spending priorities. Taxation and spending traditionally traditional have been politicized in the state: Republicans want tax cuts and Democrats want to invest surpluses in education, infrastructure, and health/social safety net programming. Other components of the budget were

also subject to an unusual level of scrutiny due to the ongoing polarization within the Republican party.

For example, for a brief period during the 2021 legislative session, revenue for the public schools derived from the lottery was threatened with a decline of an estimated \$14 million (Hartgen 2021). Legislators voted to suspend Powerball, indicating concern that when the lottery is opened up to participation from Australia and Great Britain, those forces outside the U.S. may unduly influence Idaho policy and not reflect ‘Idaho values.’ Related ideologically driven legislative action included a bill to ban K-12 and postsecondary educators from including information about racism or sexism in the curriculum. While Powerball will continue in Idaho for at least another year, ‘saving’ the threatened \$14 million, the budgetary impact of legislation constraining education, will possibly accrue litigation expenses in the coming years.

As related to legal expenses, because the Idaho Attorney General (AG) did not join the election lawsuit launched by the Texas Attorney General in early 2021, several legislators sought to ‘defund’ the Idaho AG by allowing agencies to freely contract for legal opinions rather than receiving such opinions from the Idaho AG. This was originally established as protocol to save money . . . and, indeed, it has done so over the years when government officials follow the legal opinions that they receive. Estimates are that shifting the source of legal opinions from the Idaho AG to individual contract arrangements between agencies and attorneys will cost millions.

The Governor was also targeted as legislators, concerned about efforts to stem the pandemic through masking or vaccinations, moved to limit the emergency powers that rest with that office. As an example of the concern, the legislature recessed rather than adjourned in May 2021, circumventing the power the Governor holds to call an emergency session.

The specific concerns of the legislature, social equity programming and critical race theory, were addressed in legislation as well as in targeted budget line-item reductions. Arguing that Boise State University was brainwashing students, a cohort led the removal of \$409,000 from Boise State’s budget, the estimated cost of that type of programming. The funds were reallocated to Lewis-Clark State College. While Boise State took the biggest hit, Idaho State and the University of Idaho were also penalized for social justice programming that IFF and its supporters had deemed as infusing an aggregation of anti-American thought characterized as Marxism, communism, and socialism.

Conclusion

The Executive Budget for FY 2022 continued Governor Little’s historical support of education, job growth, economic opportunity, and fostering an environment for Idaho to avoid citizen migration to other states (Little 2021a). Budget cuts were generally targeted and arguably punitive, out of concern for retaining ‘Idaho values.’ The 2021 legislative session ended up being unusually long. Normally ending in March, or in a particularly challenging year in April, the 2021 session was not to end until mid-November. The budget was essentially complete by recess on May 15. The legislature reconvened session on November 15 to address COVID-19 vaccine mandates and testing rules mandated in the private sector and by the Federal government.

Ultimately, when the legislature finally adjourned *sine die* on November 17, 2021, they only managed on a joint resolution disapproving of vaccine mandates.

Candidates for the upcoming election for several statewide offices have until March 11 to file for statewide office. Due to the documented population growth and distribution of that population between different areas of the state, redistricting will mean that Republican incumbents may end up running against one another to represent the thirty-five districts (each having two representatives and one senator). The 2022 legislative session for the FY23 budget already has the same tone in terms of tension between those who define conservatism as an elimination of government versus those who define it as prudent government. Several candidates for statewide positions have declared for the Republican primary and many of these are using the IFF indices in their campaign materials. Notably, declared candidates for Governor in the Republican primary include Ammon Bundy, an anti-government activist (recall the occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge), and the current Lt. Governor, Janice McGeachin (architect of the task force on critical race theory in education). Governor Little has not yet declared candidacy. If Brad Little does run in the May 2022 primary, the race will illustrate the tensions between the anti-government libertarian cohort in the Idaho Republican Party and the traditional Idaho fiscal conservatives, led by Little. These traditional Idaho conservatives work with the minority party to reduce taxes when possible but do not do so at the expense of education and infrastructure.

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