

SENATOR ELLIOT WERK  
REPRESENTATIVE SUE CHEW  
REPRESENTATIVE JOHN GANNON  
DISTRICT 17

Dear Neighbor:

Thank you for the honor to represent you in the Idaho Legislature. Your three legislators, known collectively as Team 17 (Senator Werk and Representatives Chew and Gannon), have developed a close collaboration that strengthens your voice in the Legislature while we work for effective, common sense public policy.

Team 17 represents you with a focus on key shared values:

- Fairness and integrity as we stand up for the middle class
- Shared responsibility as we work to protect your freedoms and improve your quality of life
- Hard work and shared accountability as we work for efficient and effective critical service delivery

The 2014 legislative session provided some solid laws that we supported. The Team had a very productive session and we found our colleagues more willing to work across the aisle to create good public policy. A focus on prison and criminal justice reform are good signs that Idaho is finally changing direction. It was unfortunate that hot button issues diverted from the priorities of the People – like schools, good jobs, increased wages, and healthcare.

**Budget:** Politicians talk a lot about what they support but if it isn't in their budget then it's all talk. A budget reflects the truth of your priorities. This election year there was lots of talk about education being THE priority but the budget belies the true priorities. While the revenue picture improved, \$36 million was placed into already full rainy day accounts while education budgets were increased only by about 5% and prisons received an 11% increase.

**Education:** Team 17 is committed to making investments in our pre-K through career education system. It is our highest priority and our votes on other issues are colored by our evaluation of the impact to schools in Idaho.

- **K-12:** Idaho stands at 50<sup>th</sup> in the nation for investment in public schools. While there was a small increase (5%) in next year's budget for public schools, funding is still over \$100 million below what it was six years (and 14,000 new students) ago. The Team is disappointed that very little progress was made on the education task force's 20 bipartisan recommendations for system redesign passed in the wake of the failure of the Luna laws.
- **Post-Secondary:** Idaho ranks 45<sup>th</sup> in the nation in high school seniors going on to college. Economic data confirms that investing in higher education is the most efficient way to provide long-term economic prosperity, higher wages rewarding career opportunities, and to move Idaho's economy into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Unfortunately Idaho's investment in these economic drivers is meager and our economy reflects this neglect. We supported the 7% increase in funding for the colleges while understanding that the institutions are still \$34 million below their funding level in 2009!

**Jobs/Economy:** Idaho is now 50<sup>th</sup> (dead last) in the nation in wages and #1 in minimum wage jobs. After 20 years of economic development by tax cut (47 of them) we must conclude that the experiment has failed (even though the House continued to recklessly churn them out). Economic development requires a long-term commitment to educating our citizens (pre-K through career) that has been lacking for the last decade or more. Thankfully majority leaders in the Senate have begun to realize that we must invest in education before we strip revenue from state government through more tax cuts for the rich.

**Healthcare:** This year, despite the concerted effort of Rep. Chew, the legislature failed to redesign the Medicaid program for the second year giving up another \$90 million in taxpayer savings. With Rep. Chew's help the Legislature expanded community mental health ([S-1352](#)) and preventive dental services ([H-395](#)) which should result in savings to taxpayers. In addition, some added safeguards were enacted to protect your privacy when using the Idaho health insurance exchange (yourhealthidaho.org).

**Human Rights:** After eight years of inaction by the legislature, the frustration of proponents of adding language to the human rights act to ban discrimination associated with sexual orientation and gender identity boiled over and peaceful, organized protests were present at the statehouse throughout the session. As supporters of human rights, the Team understands and shares this frustration and we look forward to working next session to make this needed change to Idaho law.

To further resist human rights changes, [H-426](#) and [H-427](#) were introduced to allow discrimination against any person under the guise of religious conviction. While we support religious liberty, we adamantly oppose discrimination of any type including discrimination justified by religious belief. Both bills were stopped after a concerted effort by Rep. Gannon and widespread public outcry (500 people showed up for the hearing of H-427).

**Taxes:** In an election year the House threw caution to the wind and passed a series of potentially crippling tax cuts mainly benefiting the rich and big business. This includes an income tax ([H-548](#)) costing \$126 million per year. The majority party in the House also voted to kill the cost-of-living allowance for the Homeowner's Exemption ([H-594](#)) – exposing homeowners to sharply higher property taxes. Thankfully Senator Werk's Senate tax committee blocked almost all of these destructive efforts. Team 17 viewed any tax bills with substantial costs as money taken from public schools and opposed them.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment Rights:** Team 17 continues to protect and defend your 2<sup>nd</sup> amendment rights. This year the Team supported a bill ([S-1332](#)) to ensure that law enforcement follow the Idaho constitution when confiscating firearms. However, legislation ([S-1254](#)) to allow students to carry concealed firearms to class and for everyone to openly carry firearms at BSU (and other public post-secondary campuses) became law over our strong opposition. Mail to the Team was overwhelmingly in opposition to guns on campus and we listened to you as we evaluated the trade-offs that this bill offered.

**Corrections:** Thanks to the efforts of Rep. Gannon (and others), Idaho's for-profit private prison operator (Corrections Corporations of America - CCA) – after years of lawsuits over violence, understaffing, and falsifying records – lost their contract with the state. As of July 1<sup>st</sup> Idaho will take over the taxpayer-owned prison in Boise. Unfortunately the current administration settled all potential claims against CCA for a minor sum and sealed the records. Thanks to a request by Sen. Werk (and others) the FBI is now investigating potential criminal activity by CCA associated with the falsification of records. Reform of our parole system ([S-1357](#) cosponsored by Sen. Werk) passed and will save Idaho as much as \$275 million in the next decade.

**Ag Gag** – As a result of the filming of animal abuse on a dairy in Idaho, the Dairymen brought [S-1337](#) to criminalize the filming of animal abuse in the workplace. The Team adamantly opposed this bill. Ag Gag is being challenged in court and may be costly to Idaho taxpayers. Ironically, Idaho now imposes stricter penalties for filming animal abuse than for abusing animals.

**Team 17 Efforts:** The Team had a very successful session. In addition to the issues discussed above, Rep. Chew was named Legislator of the Year by the Idaho Democratic Party for her tireless advocacy on the issues! Working together, the Team developed and co-sponsored [S-1212](#) to halt state tax breaks to companies that outsource Idaho jobs overseas. Rep. Chew focused on healthcare including working hard to pass [H-348](#) to help healthcare professionals return to work after addiction issues, [H-350](#) to limit the sale of controlled substances, [H-395](#) to restore preventive dental care, [H-396](#) to decrease prescription drug abuse, [S-1379](#) to limit the supply of illicit drugs, and ([H-565](#)) to stagger food stamp benefits. Rep. Gannon also worked to protect children with life threatening health issues by removing an exemption for parents who refuse to seek medical treatment ([H-458](#)). Sen. Werk had successful bills to protect your DNA ([S-1240a](#)) and provide an incentive for good jobs ([H-546a](#)). In addition he authored or cosponsored bills to slowly increase Idaho's minimum wage ([S-1334](#)), to add a preference for Idaho governments to hire Idaho companies ([S-1211](#)), and to expand community college services ([S-1324](#)). Team 17 (along with many of our colleagues) also cosponsored the Add the Words effort.

Again we want to stress what an honor it is to represent you in the Idaho legislature. We appreciate all of the visits to our weekly office hours, the attendance at our four public forums (**the last forum is on Tuesday, April 8<sup>th</sup> from 7:00 – 9:00 PM in the Whitney Elementary School library**), and the thousands of phone calls, emails, and letters. This input helped us to better represent you and our community. For all of this we're grateful.

Please feel free to contact any of us at any time at [team17@mindspring.com](mailto:team17@mindspring.com), or by phone at 332-1411 (Sen. Werk), 332-1049 (Rep. Chew), or 343-1608 (Rep. Gannon). We will be hard at work between legislative sessions and welcome your help and counsel.

Thank you.



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Representative, District 17



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