



2021 LEGISLATIVE REPORT

Jan. 15, 2021

Governor's State of the State

On Jan. 11, Gov. Brad Little gave his third State of the State address to kick off the 2021 legislature. This year the governor's speech, like so many events, was held virtually to observe safety measures related to COVID-19. The House and Senate gavelled in at noon, but instead of convening a traditional joint session for the governor's address, both chambers later adjourned so they could watch the remote speech in their respective chambers.

The governor's address focused heavily on the pandemic's impact on the state and the steps he has taken to support Idahoans during this time of crisis. Specifically, the governor thanked doctors, nurses, and health care workers for their heroic efforts in 2020.

In his speech, the governor outlined his vision for the 2021 legislative session. The state has a significant \$630 million budget surplus, which is due in large part to increased federal funds for pandemic response and higher than anticipated revenue projections. The governor proposed using the bulk of the surplus for tax cuts and infrastructure improvements. His budget also proposes \$250 million for public health infrastructure to continue the battle against COVID-19. He also prioritized funding to fully implement the teacher career ladder, which remains one of his top priorities.

During the session, IMA will be paying close attention to the issues outlined in our Jan. 8 legislative update, especially telehealth. In his speech, the governor mentioned the increased utilization of telehealth and the public health emergency order which implemented temporary rules for how virtual care is administered. IMA agrees with the components of this order but has raised concerns about the

policy to allow providers without an Idaho license the ability to practice telehealth in Idaho after the public health emergency ends.

Not mentioned in the address was the Medicaid budget. However, the governor's budget chief Alex Adams testified in front of the Joint Appropriations and Finance Committee that future increased federal funding from the enhanced FMAP will create a fiscally balanced approach for Medicaid expansion in 2021. If the legislature adopts this approach, we can avoid cuts to Medicaid reimbursement or services.

The House and Senate majorities, led by Republicans, plan to address the balance of powers stemming from the governor's emergency orders related to the pandemic. This topic will be a large focus in the first weeks of the session.

Vaccine reimbursement

On Jan. 12, Gov. Little announced the next phase of Idaho's COVID-19 vaccine rollout. For the remainder of January, the state will prioritize vaccines for school employees and some frontline workers. Starting Feb. 1, those individuals 65 and older can start receiving vaccines. You can view the state's updated COVID-19 vaccine distribution timeline [here](#). IMA worked with the governor's staff to ensure adequate financial resources make it into the hands of physicians and the health workforce to build capacity. A key component to a successful vaccine rollout is ensuring health care providers do not bear the burden of the costs to administer the vaccine. The IMA applauds the governor for committing resources to safely and successfully administer COVID-19 vaccines.

Balance of powers legislation

On Jan. 13, several pieces of legislation were introduced in the House and Senate to address the governor's authority regarding emergency declarations. The legislation ranges from eliminating the public health emergency declaration, allowing the legislature to convene a special session if 60% of the House and Senate support it, and requiring legislative approval for an extension of any emergency declaration by the governor beyond 30 days. The IMA is closely following this legislation to ensure the public health and safety measures are adequate to protect Idahoans and that the legislation will not impact Idaho's ability to receive federal funding for emergencies now and in the future.

To view a list of ALL healthcare-related bills and their statuses, visit the IMA Bill Tracker on the IMA website

IMA Bill Tracker

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