



IDAHO FREEDOM
FOUNDATION

HELP IDAHOANS: USE EMERGENCY POWERS TO AID RECOVERY FROM THE ECONOMIC SHUTDOWN

POLICY BRIEF | MAY 18, 2020
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SUMMARY:

Idaho has begun its path back to normalcy by entering the second stage of Gov. Brad Little's plan to reopen businesses. This plan is a lot more than just a map of what types of businesses can reopen when. It includes when public gatherings can resume, when travel can resume, when people can worship together again, and when other aspects of normal life can start.

This plan sets out a return to normalcy, but without associated policy actions, it will not reach its full potential. The governor can use his emergency powers to help the state's economy open back up.

Gov. Little should direct his power toward deregulation. If the governor takes the actions outlined below, both businesses and everyday Idahoans will be better positioned to return to their normal life.

SOLUTIONS TO SUPPORT EVERYDAY IDAHOANS:

Extend all vehicle registration expirations. Some people are going to have their motor vehicle registrations expire during this pandemic. Idahoans should not be penalized because government offices are closed, or because they do not know how to navigate the mail-in and online renewal systems that their county might offer.

For the sake of uniformity across the state, all current vehicle registrations should be extended to 60 days after the end of Idaho's state of emergency, so no registrations expire during the emergency.

Suspend driving test requirements. Both [Georgia and Wisconsin](#) are temporarily suspending the requirement for new drivers to take a road test. As long as new drivers (or their parents, in the case of teenagers) verify that all other driving requirements have been met, they can get their driver's license. In Georgia, [about 20,000 residents](#) have received their license since the requirement was suspended. These drivers will not have to take their road test until

after social distancing guidelines are estimated to be relaxed, [in the fall](#).

SOLUTIONS TO SUPPORT BUSINESSES:

Streamline the reopening of businesses. Certain businesses that have been shut down due to the governor's statewide stay-at-home order may be required to submit to inspections or a permitting process while reopening — for instance, businesses that are subject to state licensing. The Idaho Department of Commerce, to borrow an idea suggested in [Kansas](#), should team up with the state's licensing boards to create a one-stop shop for business owners, to help them navigate federal, state, and local permitting. This streamlined process would not only help business owners know now that they can reopen their business without consequence to their licenses, but it will also help business expansions and new businesses in the future.

Refund a portion of licensing fees. The state forced various businesses, including bars and restaurants, to shut down for weeks. Bars and restaurants could not use their license to sell liquor during that time. They should be compensated, since they paid for a license that they could not use. These businesses should be refunded the portion of their license fee that represents the time period they were forced to close. If a refund is not possible, then Idaho should follow the lead of [Manteno, Illinois](#), and waive all liquor license fees for the coming year.

The state should do the same thing for cosmetology establishments and other businesses that were not able to use the licenses they paid for during the state-imposed shutdown.

Allow foreign-trained doctors and nurses to practice in Idaho. To meet the increased demand for health care professionals, [several states](#), including Massachusetts and New Jersey, have allowed foreign-trained doctors to practice. Some states have specified which foreign-trained health professionals can practice within their borders; New Mexico and New York, for example, are allowing Canadian nurses to practice. Idaho should allow foreign-trained doctors and nurses — that were trained in countries with similar standards to the requirements in Idaho — to work in the state.

SOLUTIONS TO REDUCE THE BURDEN OF GOVERNMENT ON ITS RESIDENTS:

Advise all levels of government to not take on new, nonessential debt. It is not responsible for the government to go into debt when it is not able to predict the economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis. For instance, some types of taxing districts plan their debt far in advance and may be reluctant to postpone their planned debt. But government units like urban renewal districts and recreation districts need to put even their planned debt on hold, so that they do not burden their taxpayers.

Advise local governments to postpone or cancel local improvement projects. The city of Boise recently canceled the start of a series of construction projects to revamp its airport. The city properly concluded that a decreased demand for flights and an increased economic

burden due to COVID-19 meant that now is not the time for such a project. Other taxing districts should follow Boise's lead and reassess their local improvement projects.

Advise local governments to spend down their cash reserves instead of increasing property taxes. Most local taxing districts have financially prepared for emergencies by having [reserve funds](#) for unexpected costs. Instead of placing the burden of emergencies on the public by raising tax rates, local governments should first [spend down](#) their emergency money. With increased unemployment and many residents going without income, an increase in property taxes could, for some people, mean the difference between whether they can stay in their home through this pandemic, or be forced to give up their property.

Suspend all time limits on legal action. [Nevada](#) has suspended all time limits, set by state statute, regarding the deadline for the commencement of certain legal actions. This suspension will last until 30 days after the end of Nevada's state of emergency. The state of Nevada recognizes that closed courts and limited access to lawyers makes it nearly impossible for residents to file their legal grievances in a timely manner.

Without such an extension, residents may miss certain time limits set in statute, such as having to file an appeal within a certain number of days after a licensing board denial. Or, only being able to sue a government entity within a certain number of weeks after a wrong takes place. Idaho should also suspend its time limits, to allow residents to pursue their legal grievances.

Expand the number of court cases that qualify for alternative dispute resolution. Since courts have been closed down for weeks, there will be a [backlog of cases](#) as they reopen. The state of Idaho should allow more cases to be [settled outside of court](#) via an [alternative dispute resolution](#) to avoid some of this backlog.

Remove interest on late property tax payments. Each year, property owners can either pay their property taxes in full on [December 20](#) or split their taxes into two payments, with one on December 20 and one on June 20. If a property owner makes either payment late, the overdue amount accrues interest, with an initial delinquent payment fee of 2% of the property tax amount due, and then an interest of 1% each subsequent month that they did not pay. A taxpayer who has chosen a split payment and is even a few days late on the June payment ends up paying interest for 6 months of late payments because the interest becomes retroactive to that first payment due date (December 20).

Most people who pick a split payment do so because they have difficulty paying the full amount in December. The state should offer a break on the June 20 payment deadline by not penalizing those who pay late. Gov. Little can follow the example of the governor of [New Hampshire](#), who issued an executive order which allows municipalities to waive interest on late property tax payments.

Offer Idahoans some of their own money by taking initiative on unclaimed property. The state of [Louisiana](#) sent over \$10.4 million in unclaimed property checks to its residents in late April after using data-matching technology to find the owners of the unclaimed money. If Idaho replicated such action, it would offer monetary relief to some Idahoans without having much fiscal impact on the state.

Permanently eliminate any regulations that were waived due to COVID-19 and did not result in any adverse consequences. Idaho elected officials should borrow an idea suggested in [Kansas](#) and view temporary deregulation as a test for permanent deregulation. Gov. Little has helped make Idaho the least-regulated state in the nation. In order to keep this title, the governor should use COVID-19 as an opportunity to see how unnecessary some government regulation may be. And after this pandemic is over, the governor should push to make some of his temporary deregulations permanent.