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Senator Cook's Weekly Update 3/3 - 3/7

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WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

March 10th, 2025

This past week...

Here's a look at what's been happening at the Capitol this week:

House Bill 40: Major Tax Relief for Hardworking Idahoans

[\(click here for more bill information\)](#)

I'm thrilled to share great news about tax relief for Idaho families and businesses! On Tuesday, the Senate passed **House Bill 40**, and just a day later, the Governor signed it into law – delivering \$253 million in income tax cuts and ensuring more of your hard-earned money stays in your pockets.



What Does This Bill Do?

House Bill 40 provides tax relief in three key ways:

- **Lower Income Tax Rates** – The individual and business tax rate drops from 5.695% to 5.3%, saving Idaho taxpayers \$240 million annually.
- **Support for Military Veterans** – More military retirement pay is now tax-exempt, allowing veterans to keep more of what they've earned.
- **Encouraging Smart Investments** – The bill eliminates capital gains taxes on precious metal bullion, making Idaho an even better place for investment.

Why This Matters

Idaho continues to lead in fiscal responsibility and tax relief, having returned \$4.6 billion to taxpayers. House Bill 40 reinforces our commitment to keeping taxes low while ensuring the state budget remains balanced, as required by the Idaho Constitution.

Some argued that Idaho should wait before cutting taxes, but I firmly believe that returning money to taxpayers is the right thing to do. Lower taxes empower families and businesses to thrive, strengthening our state's economy and future.

The Work Doesn't Stop Here

This is the largest income tax cut in Idaho history, but our work isn't finished. We're actively pursuing further property tax reductions, an increase in the grocery tax

credit, and strong support for education funding.

I'm proud to support policies that benefit Idaho's families, businesses, and veterans. Thank you for your trust as we continue working to keep Idaho strong and prosperous!

Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee (JFAC) Update

This week, the Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee (JFAC) finalized Idaho's revenue projection for Fiscal Year 2026, setting it at \$6.4 billion—a 6.8% increase over the current fiscal year. This projection is critical because it determines how much money we have available for budgeting essential services like education, infrastructure, and public safety.

Revenue Should Come First, Not Last

For the past month, I've emphasized that revenue estimates should be set *before* allocating billions in taxpayer dollars—not after. Yet, for only the second time in JFAC's history, the committee approved budgets first and set revenue later. This week, we finally set Idaho's revenue projection for Fiscal Year 2026 at \$6.4 billion—a 6.8% increase over the current fiscal year.



This projection is critical because it determines how much funding is available for essential services like education, infrastructure, and public safety. But by setting it *after* making spending decisions, we undermine transparency and responsible budgeting. I've consistently pushed for an open, transparent budget process where revenue estimates are debated first. Idahoans deserve better. We should know how much money we have before committing to spending it—not the other way around.

Big Wins for Idaho Taxpayers

Despite these challenges, the Idaho Legislature passed key tax relief measures:

- **House Bill 40** – A historic income tax cut reducing state revenue by \$253 million, lowering the individual and business tax rate from 5.695% to 5.3%.
- **House Bill 304** – Allocates \$100 million to reduce property taxes and help fund school construction.
- **House Bill 231** – Expands the grocery tax credit, easing the cost of food for Idaho families.

A Commitment to Accountability

A COMMITMENT TO ACCOUNTABILITY

While some revenue reports show shortfalls in the current fiscal year, Idaho's economy remains strong, with revenues up 2.9% from last year. April will be a crucial month as tax filings provide a clearer financial outlook.

As your State Senator, I will continue fighting for a smarter, more accountable budgeting process — one that prioritizes transparency, fiscal responsibility, and taxpayer interests. Idahoans deserve nothing less.

Grocery Tax Rebate – More Money Back in Your Pocket!

[\(Click here for more bill information\)](#)

Exciting news! The Senate just passed House Bill 231, increasing the Grocery Tax Rebate from \$120 to \$155 per person, per year! That's a nearly 50% increase over the past five years — putting more money where it belongs: in your pocket.



Why This Matters:

- Every Idaho resident who files taxes qualifies, helping offset grocery costs.
- Out-of-state visitors still pay the tax but don't receive the rebate, keeping more of Idaho's tax dollars here at home.
- Fair and effective tax policy — providing direct relief to families while maintaining funding for essential services.

What This Means for You:

- **Individuals:** Now receive **\$155** per year instead of **\$120**. **Seniors:** Increase from **\$140** to **\$155** per year. **Families of four:** Now receive **\$620** annually — helping offset the sales tax on approximately **\$10,000 worth of groceries**.

What's Next?

The bill has already passed the House with strong support and is now headed to the Governor's desk. If signed into law, the increased rebate will take effect retroactively to January 1, 2025, meaning you can claim the higher rebate next tax season!

I proudly supported and voted for this bill because Idaho families deserve real relief from rising costs. This is a practical, immediate step to help hardworking Idahoans while keeping

House Bill 146: Idaho's Night Skies Get Brighter

HOUSE BILL 146: IDAHO'S NIGHT SKIES GET BRIGHTER – By Becoming Darker!

[\(Click here for more bill information\)](#)

Every night when I look out my window, I see those red flashing lights on the hills. If you live near a wind farm, you probably do too – flashing bright, **all night long**. While these lights are essential for aviation safety, they also create light pollution, disrupting Idaho's natural beauty and rural communities.



That's why I proudly voted **YES** on House Bill 146 (HB146) – a new law requiring wind turbines to use light-mitigating technology so that the lights remain off unless an aircraft is nearby.

What HB146 Does:

- Requires new wind turbines to install light-mitigating technology before beginning operations.
- Mandates existing wind farms to add this technology over time.
- Keeps costs on wind farm developers – not taxpayers.
- Maintaining aviation safety while preserving Idaho's breathtaking night skies

This bill is a win for both conservation and innovation, proving that Idaho can support renewable energy while protecting our rural way of life. I'm proud to champion smart policies that protect both our communities and our future.

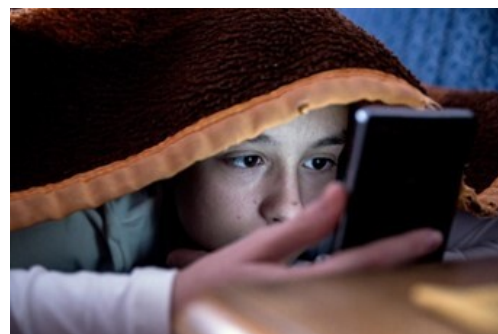
Protecting Idaho's Kids Online: A Big Step Forward

[\(Click here for more bill information\)](#)

This past Wednesday, my **Children's Protection Device Act (SB 1158)** passed unanimously in the **Senate State Affairs Committee!**

What SB 1158 Does:

- Automatically activates parental filters when a mobile device is set up for a minor in Idaho.
- Parents maintain control – filters can be turned off if preferred.
- No impact on adults – if unrestricted access is desired, nothing changes.



Why This Matters:

- Children are being exposed to harmful content online without their parents realizing it.
- As made evident last week, Big Tech companies refuse to engage, making it clear that the government must step in.
- Many parents don't even know these parental filters exist, this bill makes protection the default!

How You Can Help With What's Next:

There will be a **public hearing THIS WEDNESDAY, March 12th at 8:00 AM** before the Senate State Affairs Committee. You can testify **from home** – virtual testimony is available, **your voice matters!**

If you believe in protecting children from harmful online content, please consider testifying in support of SB 1158. Your testimony could make all the difference.

SCR111: Recognizing and Supporting Family Values

[\(Click here for more bill information\)](#)

The Idaho Senate has taken a significant step in reaffirming the importance of family values by passing Senate Concurrent Resolution 111 (SCR111). This bill officially designates the period between Mother's Day and Father's Day as Traditional Family Values Month. This initiative emphasizes the essential role of family structures in fostering societal stability and prosperity.



Key Highlights of SCR111:

- **Family Values Month:** Spans from Mother's Day to Father's Day, honoring the vital role of families.
- **Weekly Focus:**
 - **Week 1:** Celebrating motherhood – the foundation of family life.
 - **Week 2:** Recognizing sons, brothers, and uncles for their contributions.
 - **Week 3:** Honoring **grandparents**, the pillars of wisdom and tradition.
 - **Week 4:** Celebrating **daughters, sisters, and aunts** for their essential roles.
 - **Final Week:** Culminating with **Father's Day**, recognizing fatherhood and the significance of marriage between a man and a woman.
- **Call to Action:** The resolution encourages communities, schools, churches, businesses, and other stakeholders to actively participate in celebrating

Traditional Family Values Month, promoting activities that strengthen family bonds and uphold traditional values.

Why This Matters:

Research consistently shows that children raised in stable, traditional family environments experience numerous benefits, including:

- Health Benefits: Lower risks of mental illness, alcoholism, and domestic violence.
- Educational Advantages: Higher academic achievements and lower dropout rates.
- Social Outcomes: Reduced likelihood of engaging in criminal activities and lower incidences of drug addiction.

By dedicating this month to **traditional family values**, Idaho aims to raise awareness about the challenges facing families today. Idaho is reaffirming the **importance of strong family structures** and **preserving the foundation of our society**.

Coming up next week...

Will the JFAC committee set a revenue or just keep spending?

Public hearing on March 12th at 8:00 AM: on my Children's Protection Device Act (SB 1158). Please join- your voice matters!

Big discussions on Medicaid Expansion and Managed Care Organizations (MCOs).

The house will hopefully pass [SCR106 - Religious Freedom Day](#), and [SJM101 - Securing Idaho's Water Future](#).

You can watch the Senate sessions [live by clicking here](#).

It's an honor to serve you, and I always welcome your thoughts and feedback. Please don't hesitate to reach out. Together, we can continue strengthening Idaho's future.

Sen Kevin Cook

Contact and Connect:

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- Breakfast with Senator Cook: Live on Facebook: 9 AM Saturday



Committees:

- Education
- Finance
- Resources & Environment

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