

MINUTES
SENATE HEALTH & WELFARE COMMITTEE

DATE: Thursday, February 04, 2021

TIME: 3:00 P.M.

PLACE: Room WW54

MEMBERS PRESENT: Vice Chairman Riggs, Senators Heider, Lee, Harris, Agenbroad, Zito, Stennett, and Wintrow

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: Chairman Martin

NOTE: The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

CONVENED: **Vice Chairman Riggs** called the meeting of the Senate Health and Welfare Committee (Committee) to order at 3:00 p.m.

MINUTES APPROVAL: **Senator Stennett** moved to approve the Minutes of January 19, 2021. **Senator Lee** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

Senator Wintrow moved to approve the Minutes of January 20, 2021. **Senator Heider** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

Senator Agenbroad moved to approve the Minutes of January 21, 2021. **Senator Stennett** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

Senator Heider moved to the approve the Minutes of January 25, 2021. **Senator Wintrow** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

Vice Chairman Riggs announced the Committee would take up the Minutes of January 26, 2021 later in the meeting.

SCR 102 **Relating to Activation of Closed Captioning on Television Monitors in Public Venues.** **Senator Agenbroad** stated he supports the resolution, and he introduced Valerie Player and Steven Snow to provide additional information.

Valerie Player introduced herself to the Committee on behalf of Idaho Hands and Voices, a parent-driven organization supporting families with deaf and hard of hearing children. **Ms. Player** demonstrated an example of closed captions. She reported closed captioning is free to use and makes news, education, and entertainment accessible to the deaf and hard of hearing. **Ms. Player** commented closed captioning has been available on every television set manufactured since 1990 and can be activated by pressing a single button.

Senator Stennett asked how frequently closed captioning is used for the public who needs it. **Ms. Player** responded staff at most venues will turn it on if asked and if the requester shows how to do it, but most are unaware of how simple it is.

Steven Snow, Executive Director of the Idaho Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (Council), introduced himself to the Committee. **Mr. Snow** explained the function of the Council and stated the Council fully supports the resolution. He reported the Council received several phone calls from constituents regarding restaurants and other public venues with staff who are unaware of closed captioning or who refuse to turn it on even after having it explained to them. **Mr. Snow** said, as a deaf person, he has personally had this experience. He added that passing the resolution would encourage staff at public venues to turn on closed captioning and leave it on so the deaf would not have to ask for that accommodation in the future. **Mr. Snow** described the steps to turn on closed captioning. He mentioned a 2006 research study finding that approximately 80 percent of people who used closed captioning are hearing, showing the general public benefits from closed captioning. **Mr. Snow** asked the Committee to support the resolution.

Vice Chairman Riggs commented he used closed captioning in his home because it helped his sons learn to read.

MOTION:

Senator Harris moved to send **SCR 102** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Wintrow** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

MINUTES APPROVAL:

Senator Harris moved to approve the Minutes of January 26, 2021. **Senator Stennett** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

RS 28395

Relating to Public Health Districts. **Senator Vick** introduced himself to the Committee. He explained the RS would require any county- or district-wide order issued by a public health district to be approved by the district's county commissions. **Senator Vick** advised the RS limits the length of an order to 30 days with the opportunity for a 30-day extension upon approval of the county commissions. He added the penalty for a violation would change from a misdemeanor to an infraction with a fine of \$50.

DISCUSSION:

Senator Wintrow asked the pros and cons of the RS, how it would affect the ability of health districts to make decisions, any cost benefits, and how to account for recommendations of medical professionals based on scientific data. **Senator Vick** answered he has worked closely with the health districts to develop the RS. He stated if health experts sit on health district boards, then the boards make better health decisions. **Senator Vick** averred an elected official who is accountable to the voters should be the decision maker on health orders. He added the health district board can discuss an order and determine whether to take it to the county commission. **Senator Vick** commented the RS would exempt orders for issues such as restaurant violations or disease quarantine. He added that the genesis of the RS was the mask mandate orders issued by public health districts. **Senator Vick** opined that protestors should voice their concerns to elected officials and not health district boards.

Senator Stennett requested clarification that the RS would not reorganize the current health district structure or the process for selecting board members. **Senator Vick** replied the RS does not change the composition of a health district board.

MOTION:

Senator Lee moved to send **RS 28395** to print. **Senator Harris** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

**GUBERNATORIAL
REAPPOINTMENT:**

Committee Consideration of the Gubernatorial Reappointment of Elizabeth Elroy to the Board of Environmental Quality (Board). Ms. Elroy introduced herself to the Committee and provided a brief overview of her background. She mentioned her 10 years of experience on the Board and said she enjoys using her experience in environmental engineering and science to give back to the State.

Senator Lee thanked Ms. Elroy for her service. She asked Ms. Elroy to comment on challenges and opportunities at the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and inquired how the Committee can be helpful. **Ms. Elroy** observed DEQ's outstanding leadership over the past 10 years and enjoyment working with Director John Tippetts and Director Jess Byrne. She stated it is critical for DEQ to attract and retain top talent, and succession planning is needed to develop talent and promote employees from within the organization. **Ms. Elroy** identified Director Byrne's promotion as a good example of succession planning that allowed him to step seamlessly into the director role upon Director Tippetts' retirement. She added that DEQ does a good job protecting the environment but also must focus on sustainability initiatives. **Ms. Elroy** commented that it will be an interesting balance for DEQ to meld sustainability with environmental regulations, innovation, and business opportunities.

Vice Chairman Riggs announced the Committee would vote on Ms. Elroy's reappointment at its next meeting.

PRESENTATION:

WWAMI/Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes (ECHO) Idaho. **Dr. Jeff Seegmiller**, Regional Dean, Idaho WWAMI Program, introduced himself to the Committee. **Dr. Seegmiller** stated he is based at the University of Idaho. He advised Dr. Mary Barinaga, Regional Dean for WWAMI at the University of Washington School of Medicine, was also present. **Dr. Seegmiller** commented WWAMI came into existence 49 years ago and is Idaho's publicly supported medical school.

Dr. Barinaga introduced herself to the Committee and gave an overview of her background. She described the WWAMI program as a partnership of the States of Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, and Idaho (see Attachment 1). **Dr. Barinaga** provided statistics regarding WWAMI's effectiveness and commented on its benefits to the State of Idaho as well as challenges facing the State.

Dr. Seegmiller explained the ECHO program and its role in connecting health care professionals to learn and solve problems. He commented it was especially helpful in sharing information on COVID-19, and ECHO is also helping practitioners improve the quality of health care in rural Idaho for issues related to behavioral health and opioid abuse. **Dr. Seegmiller** expressed his gratitude for the State's financial support of these programs.

DISCUSSION:

Senator Stennett noted that the number of health issues observed in 2020 was much higher than in previous years. She asked if some of ECHO's success can be attributed to the expansion of telehealth services. **Dr. Seegmiller** responded that ECHO provides resources to health care practitioners and assists them in working with each other. He added it is not a program of telemedicine between clinician to patient. **Dr. Seegmiller** observed that a clinician struggling with a difficult health issue in a rural area can use technology to bring the case to a panel of other practitioners for their feedback.

Senator Lee stated she is excited to hear the State's financial support of the ECHO program was helpful in responding to the pandemic. She commented she hears positive feedback from practitioners in her rural district about the support they receive for substance abuse and mental health issues. **Senator Lee** noted the Committee is a policy committee, and she wondered what the Committee could do to assist the ECHO program. **Dr. Seegmiller** thanked the Committee for its support of the ECHO program and mentioned that raising awareness of ECHO is the most important way to help the program reach its maximum potential Statewide.

Senator Wintrow described an incident regarding a constituent with a child suffering from a rare disease. She said because of the lack of pediatric neurologists in Idaho, the constituent took her child to Seattle, but the child's health was damaged due to the length of time involved to receive treatment. **Senator Wintrow** subsequently heard of a learning community in rural New Mexico that was established to assist practitioners with unique patient cases, and she sponsored a resolution in 2017 to raise awareness of rare diseases and programs like ECHO. **Senator Wintrow** added she received an invitation to observe a virtual panel where practitioners discussed opioid abuse cases. She stated her belief that programs like ECHO offer a very good return on investment.

Senator Harris commented there are four critical care hospitals in his district and Dr. Lance Hansen, a WWAMI graduate, practices at Bear Lake Memorial Hospital in Montpelier. He stated the community benefits greatly from Dr. Hansen's involvement with the hospital.

Vice Chairman Riggs inquired if the University of Washington School of Medicine is sufficient for WWAMI to keep up with population growth in Idaho and the loss of practitioners reaching retirement. He inquired as to any discussion regarding a new medical school in Idaho. **Dr. Seegmiller** responded that it is a complex program and a shortage of practitioners will exist for some time. He observed there are challenges with having enough seats and State support to sustain existing programs, along with the need to encourage students to apply for medical school. **Dr. Seegmiller** added that lack of opportunities for residencies in Idaho is a critical issue, and there is presently insufficient staff at some facilities. **Dr. Barinaga** explained a residency is the most important way to attract and retain a doctor in Idaho. She reported the shortage is not caused by too few medical students, rather there are no opportunities for surgical or obstetrical residencies in Idaho. **Dr. Barinaga** mentioned that many students from the for-profit medical school in Meridian cannot find residency spots in Idaho, and those students are forced to leave for other states. She reported the greatest need is for family practitioners with rural backgrounds who want to practice in rural areas, along with general surgeons and behavioral health practitioners. There are also areas of the State with no obstetrical physicians.

Vice Chairman Riggs commented he appreciated the presentation, and he stated it was fortuitous that ECHO was in place during 2020 to provide support for rural practitioners.

ADJOURNED:

There being no further business at this time, **Vice Chairman Riggs** adjourned the meeting at 3:55 p.m.

Senator Martin
Chair

Jeanne Jackson-Heim
Secretary