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HOUSE OF
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Idaho State Legislature

December 15, 2020

The Honorable Scott Bedke
The Honorable Chuck Winder
Idaho State Legislature

Dear Mr. Speaker and Mr. President,

We, the House and Senate Minority Leaders of the Idaho Legislature, are writing to urge your support for postponement of the upcoming legislative session until at least April 5, 2021, or until those Idahoans who so desire have had an opportunity to be vaccinated. Last Wednesday alone, more Americans died of COVID-19 than died on 9/11, D-Day, or in the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and hospitalization, infection and death rates are only climbing. In Idaho, our hospitals and intensive care units are at dangerous occupancy levels, and we are hurtling toward the dreaded crisis standards of care where healthcare will for the first time in our lifetimes be rationed in Idaho. Under such extraordinary circumstances, the leaders of our state should be setting an example to reduce transmission, not exacerbate it. Proceeding with session in a few weeks, indoors, in-person, and with no masking or distancing requirements flies in the face of all public health guidance, sets the worst possible example for our citizens, and would likely contribute substantially to community transmission at a time when our healthcare facilities can least afford to be further inundated.

We are not aware of any other state that plans to move forward with legislative proceedings as if there is no pandemic – our sister states are either postponing, proceeding with virtual sessions, or at least requiring masks and distancing protocols. We urge you not to distinguish Idaho as the most reckless legislature in America. In response to our previous requests, we have been told that Republican leadership will not consider the mask requirements or virtual / remote proceedings that some other states have chosen to implement. Accordingly, we ask that you postpone session for a reasonable period to allow for more widespread vaccination.

Vaccines are being shipped to Idaho as we write this letter, but will likely not be fully deployed and available until at least late March of 2021. Why subject legislators, their families, staff, journalists and the public to a highly dangerous environment when we can do all the necessary work a few months later at a vastly reduced risk once vaccines have been made widely available? The state's business can be conducted more thoroughly and thoughtfully later, at a time when we are not racing to shorten proceedings due to unprecedented health threats. Postponing session would afford the people of Idaho a much more meaningful opportunity to have a voice in the proceedings of their government; many citizens want to attend hearings and testify in person, and could do so safely in a few months. Let's give them that opportunity, and not force the people of Idaho to choose between their health and their civic voice.

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We hope you will heed our request, and we stand at the ready to assist in any way we can.

Regards,



Senator Michelle Stennett
Senate Minority Leader



Representative Ilana Rubel
House Minority Leader