

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Times of Crisis: Working Together for Safe, Secure Elections**

America has seen times of civil and world war, economic turbulence and pandemic. Through these difficult and disruptive times, elections have always been preserved. Today we face very real difficulties conducting elections in the midst of this global pandemic. As in the past, we must meet these challenging times with smart solutions that build on our existing election laws. With the support of our community, we are fully committed to making sure the November election is carried out safely, with integrity and public confidence in the results.

Even without the complexities of the coronavirus, the presidential election is going to be challenging, due to high interest and turnout. The seismic shift in voting behavior in such a short time, along with the constraints placed on voting by the pandemic, means this will be an election unlike any that we have ever encountered.

Typically, in Idaho, only 10 percent of voters cast a ballot by absentee during a presidential election. Given the current pandemic, we anticipate that as many as 75 percent of voters will take advantage of the absentee ballot process this November. As we experienced during the May Primary, shifting to a large absentee election presents its own challenges. We do not have the ongoing infrastructure to simultaneously run an absentee election of that scale, along with an in-person election.

Yet absentee voting provides a safe and secure way for Idahoans to vote, and has long been used by overseas citizens and military personnel and their families. To vote absentee in Idaho, a voter must request a ballot, unlike a universal vote by mail system, wherein ballots are mailed to all registered voters automatically. Many security measures are in place with absentee voting, including (but not limited to) reviewing ballot signatures on each returned ballot.

To handle the unprecedented volume of absentee ballots that we are anticipating, we are calling for a simple legislative change to allow county clerks to open and scan ballots in advance of Election Day. This simple change would significantly aid us in our efforts to count ballots and provide timely results.

At the same time, we are also committed to those Idahoans who want to cast their ballots at the polls, while ensuring the process is safe for the voters and poll workers. Some counties have

already encountered difficulty finding polling places that allow adequate space for social distancing. Poll worker recruitment is also challenging, as many of our poll workers worry for their own health and for the health of the public gathering at polling places.

We have a unique opportunity to both provide greater convenience to voters and address some of the polling place concerns with the concept of vote centers, however legislation is needed to make vote centers possible. The anticipated shift from in-person voting to absentee in November will result in fewer voters at polling locations. Should a county decide to utilize vote centers, it would allow any voter to go to any voting location in their county to cast their vote. Imagine the ease of being able to pop in to the nearest vote center at your convenience on Election Day to cast your vote and avoid lines. Voting centers in large venues would allow voters to maintain social distancing and would require fewer staff.

As we work to conduct a challenging and complex election in November, we are asking for the support, patience, and understanding of our community, our Governor, and our legislature. As your local elected Clerks, neighbors, and fellow Idahoans, we are dedicated to safeguarding elections in Idaho. Small changes to existing Idaho Election laws will make a big difference in helping us provide a smooth and safe voting experience for every eligible Idahoan in November, whether someone votes early, via absentee, or on Election Day.

### **Op-Ed Co-Signers**

Ada County Clerk	Phil McGrane	Gooding County	Denise Gill
Adams County	Sherry Ward	Idaho County	Kathy Ackerman
Bannock County	Jason Dixon	Jefferson County	Colleen Poole
Bear Lake County	Cindy Garner	Jerome County	Michelle Emerson
Benewah County	Deanna Bramblett	Kootenai County	Jim Brannon
Bingham County	Pamela Eckhardt	Latah County	Henrienne Westberg
Blaine County	JoLynn Drage	Lemhi County	Brenda Armstrong
Boise County	Mary Prisco	Lewis County	Lisa Winner
Bonner County	Michael Rosedale	Lincoln County	Brenda Farnworth
Bonneville County	Penny Manning	Madison County	Kim Muir
Boundary County	Glenda Poston	Minidoka County	Tonya Page
Butte County	Shelly Blackner	Nez Perce County	Patty Weeks
Canyon County	Chris Yamamoto	Oneida County	Lon Colton
Caribou County	Denise Horsley	Owyhee County	Angie Barkell
Cassia County	Joseph Larsen	Payette County	Lindsey Bratcher
Clark County	Judith Martinez	Power County	Sharee Sprague
Clearwater County	Carrie Bird	Shoshone County	Tammie Eberhard
Custer County	Lura Baker	Teton County	Kim Keeley
Elmore County	Shelley Essl	Twin Falls County	Kristina Glascock
Franklin County	Camille Larsen	Valley County	Doug Miller
Fremont County	Abbie Mace	Washington County	Donna Atwood
Gem County	Shelly Tilton		

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