



## 2025 State of the State and Budget Address

*Governor Brad Little*

*January 6, 2025*

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Pro Tem, Mr. President, honored legislators, my fellow constitutional officers, Mr. Chief Justice and members of the judiciary, my wife and your First Lady, Teresa, my family, friends, and my fellow Idahoans.

Just two months ago, on the eve of a historic presidential election, America teetered between two very different futures for the next four years and beyond. One future guaranteed the status quo – out of control federal spending, a lawless open border, sky high inflation, onerous regulations, and a depressed economy that traps families’ potential.

Americans rejected that failed path and instead re-elected a man with a very different vision for America – Donald Trump.

President Trump’s vision for America actually looks a lot like Idaho! With their votes, Americans affirmed they want for our country what Idaho has - safe communities, bustling economic activity, increasing incomes, tax relief, fewer regulations, fiscal responsibility, and common-sense values.

I am excited about President Trump’s return to the White House. We have a renewed opportunity to help him deliver results and show the rest of the country how to do things right!

And that starts with KEEPING PROMISES.

Idaho’s elected leaders have promised and delivered real results over and over and over for the people we serve.

I want to congratulate all our legislators on their elections and recognize the new members of leadership in both parties. As a former legislator and member of Senate leadership, I understand the challenges and the rewards of bringing everyone together. I commit to all my legislative partners that we will work productively together this legislative session.

Together, we promised Idahoans historic tax relief and delivered back to back to back tax cuts for Idaho families and businesses. We delivered property tax cuts and a new lower flat income tax. We increased the grocery tax rebate, and we stand ready to implement President Trump's promised tax cuts.

My KEEPING PROMISES plan continues the trend. I am proposing yet another round of tax relief for hardworking Idaho families – \$100 million – on top of the \$4.6 billion we have already given back to Idahoans over the past five years!

We also promised and delivered unprecedented investments in schools, the American worker, water, roads, fire, outdoor recreation, and other infrastructure without raising taxes.

My KEEPING PROMISES plan builds on those investments by adding more support for schools --- on top of the 80 percent increase in state funding we championed for education since I took office.

Idaho offers an abundance of schooling options for each student's unique needs. We lead the nation in expanding and supporting public charter schools. I was proud to receive the national Charter School Champion award on behalf of our state after we cut red tape and added more support and flexibility last year. Public charter schools are unquestionably popular in our state, serving about 30,000 students, up 30 percent from just five years ago. I support charter schools because they offer families more options for their children's education while providing taxpayers the accountability and transparency they deserve. We are also one of the few states that enable parents to choose the best school for their children regardless of where they live, and our popular Empowering Parents program offers grants to support students' education outside of the classroom.

We ARE a leader in education freedom.

I recognize the growing desire to expand school choice especially for students with unique physical or developmental conditions. I am recommending \$50 million to further expand education options for Idaho families.

Just like we do with every taxpayer dollar that is spent in government, we will ensure there is oversight in school choice. Why? Because accountability in government is an Idaho value, and it is what taxpayers demand and deserve.

Just as we expect the following from our public schools, any school choice measure I would consider must be done the Idaho way, which means it is fair, responsible, transparent, and accountable. It must prioritize the families that need it most and it must not take funds away from public schools.

We will do so while continuing to prioritize first and foremost our public schools. Adequately funding public schools is both our constitutional and our moral obligation, and we will not abandon that obligation.

We have significantly improved teacher pay and health benefits, increased funding for literacy, and began to address the longstanding facilities needs in schools across Idaho.

However, even with the historic investments over the past five years, there are still known gaps. My KEEPING PROMISES plan includes over \$150 million for public schools. I look forward to working with the Legislature to address gaps in rural school facilities, mental health, school safety, and literacy.

We also must embrace accountability in public schools to guarantee the best outcomes for our students. Together, we will ensure the best education in Idaho is in a public school.

We have also kept our promises to Idahoans by standing up for common sense values. Idaho was the first state to take action to defend women's sports. I was incredibly proud of the Boise State University women's volleyball team for standing up for what's right. Generations have worked hard to guarantee our girls and women can play fair and square. To our female athletes, we will continue to fight for you!

Reflecting on the past year, two natural elements consumed Idahoans' attention – water and fire.

Our farmers confronted a real problem head on – the long-term decline of water in the aquifer that sustains Idaho agriculture. Our farmers worked hard to secure a new water deal that safeguards Idaho's water sovereignty. Friends, let's thank our farmers. Along with our citizen legislators and Lt. Governor Scott Bedke, they crafted a new plan that maintains control of our water destiny, not other states, not the feds, and not the men and women in robes. My KEEPING PROMISES plan helps tackle the backlog of unfunded water projects because securing water for future generations and protecting Idaho agriculture requires both the new plan and continued investments that have proven to raise water levels in the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer – the lifeblood of Idaho agriculture.

On the heels of a destructive fire season, our KEEPING PROMISES plan also deploys additional bonuses to hire and retain wildland firefighters. Our firefighters battle dangerous conditions to protect lives, property, and our natural resources. Please recognize a few of these tough Idahoans we have with us today. I am also asking the Legislature to properly fund the fire suppression account so these firefighters know we've got their back.

Last summer, I called out the feds for not putting out wildfires more aggressively. The State of Idaho leads on fire and forest management where the feds have failed. Idahoans are tired of choking on smoke for weeks on end. I look forward to working with the Trump administration to boldly transform how wildfire and our western lands are managed.

How else are we keeping our promises to Idahoans? With more people traveling Idaho's highways than ever before, we have responsibly championed historic transportation investments to keep up with record growth without raising taxes. Our KEEPING PROMISES plan keeps our foot on the gas with additional transportation funding. We will continue to

improve our existing roads and bridges and get people and products across our state safely and efficiently.

It's true we are victims of our own success. Growth does indeed come with many opportunities, but it also comes with challenges. The cost of owning a home is just too expensive for too many Idaho families. You have all heard me state my goal from day one – to make Idaho the place where our children and grandchildren choose to stay and for the ones who have left to choose to come home. It's difficult to achieve that goal when home ownership is so far out of reach.

We are feeling the pinch in housing supply. I look forward to working with legislators to remove even more regulatory barriers and further advance needed permitting reforms in order to keep up with housing demand. In 2022, this body put record amounts into workforce housing, creating thousands of homes for Idaho families. Our KEEPING PROMISES plan will help build even more homes so more working families can achieve the American Dream.

We also need skilled labor to keep up with the pace of development. Our efforts to get more Idaho kids into the trades is helping.

Across the country, the number of students on track to a career is declining, but not in Idaho. Idaho is bucking the trend. Thanks to LAUNCH, we had the largest cohort ever of students enrolled in an education or training program after high school. Two-thirds of the students who went on to an Idaho school last year used a LAUNCH grant. Community college attendance surged 15 percent. Those are real results. LAUNCH convinced kids who never would have considered training after high school to go on.

Many of these students will support the industries that help us keep up with growth – jobs in construction, auto technicians, and plumbers, along with welders, electricians, and a host of other professions. My KEEPING PROMISES plan increases capacity for working class Idahoans to get on the fast track to a career.

There is one major takeaway from the historic presidential election two months ago: the working people of America want someone fighting for them. President Trump himself said, “We must embrace new and effective job-training approaches.” Mr. President, we welcome the opportunity to work with you to structure innovative, effective workforce training programs like Idaho's LAUNCH across the nation!

There is no doubt Idaho is on a roll. Even Elon Musk posted on social media three times in one day about Idaho's red tape reduction successes. We know we have caught the attention of the rest of the country.

President Trump's new Department of Government Efficiency is already looking to Idaho for the blueprint on how to cut red tape, stimulate economic growth, and streamline government. Idaho stands ready to partner with the Trump administration.

As the least regulated state in the country, Idaho has an incredible story to share – one worth replicating elsewhere, including Washington, D.C. In the coming weeks, I will highlight all the ways Idaho is conquering waste in government, with some brand-new ideas on reducing government’s footprint in people’s lives.

As the new administration takes over in two weeks, we know a more secure border is imminent. As President Trump and Congress deliver on their own promises to lock down the border, Idaho stands ready to help deport dangerous criminals here illegally.

The Idaho State Police just wrapped up their fourth mission to the border. They intercepted deadly drugs and apprehended criminals coming across the open border under the Biden administration. No other state has completed more missions to border states than Idaho. As they have before, our troopers returned with new knowledge and will train other law enforcement agencies on the drug cartels’ latest tactics. We have some of those troopers here with us today. Thank you for your dedicated service to our state.

Meanwhile, Idaho is taking even more steps to keep our communities safe. Working with local law enforcement partners, we reduced crime in Idaho by 17 percent since I took office, despite record population growth! Violent crime is at a five-year low, and we are among the top ten safest states.

But there is more we can do. My KEEPING PROMISES plan includes the addition of a new prosecutor in North Idaho who will solely focus on putting away drug traffickers. Unlike drug-friendly states, including neighboring Oregon, we are sending a clear message to nefarious criminals that the only place they’re welcome in Idaho is behind bars.

But we also continue to see the benefits of our meaningful investments in corrections. We are demonstrating we can be tough on crime while ensuring those who want to become productive members of society have an off-ramp to a better life.

When it comes to the safety of Americans, China and Russia are working around the clock to inflict harm through cyber threats. We routinely beat back foreign hackers to protect Idahoans’ data, and the leading experts at the Idaho National Laboratory continue the fight against bad actors. But we will do even more to protect citizens online. My KEEPING PROMISES plan reinforces our state’s defenses against China and Russia by adding more resources in cybersecurity.

My friends, I am excited to hit the ground running and pick up where we left off with President Trump. We stand ready to hold up Idaho as the shining example of how to properly and minimally govern, which starts and ends with KEEPING PROMISES to the people we serve.

As we prepare to celebrate the 250<sup>th</sup> birthday of our great country, we reflect on what it means to be an American. Our past and our future are rooted in freedom and self-reliance while taking care of each other and with a constant faith in God.

To the people of Idaho, as your elected leaders, we promise to continue governing responsibly and to uphold freedom and common sense in our decisions.

Like we've done time and time again, we WILL deliver on that promise. Thank you and God bless.