

Caldwell Chamber calls for state aid on transportation, education

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From left to right — Jim Rice, Christy Perry, Greg Chaney, Scott Syme and Jerom Wagoner at the Caldwell Chamber of Commerce luncheon on Tuesday.



About 100 people gathered at the Caldwell Chamber of Commerce luncheon at College of Idaho's Simplot Dining Hall on

CALDWELL — Health care costs, transportation along Interstate 84 and behavioral health were among the issues the Caldwell Chamber of Commerce listed as its top legislative priorities.

This was part of a panel discussion at the Chamber's annual legislative luncheon, held Tuesday. The 2018 legislative session begins on Jan. 8.

I-84 widening project

Chamber members are calling on legislative representatives to seek funding that would fast-track the expansion of I-84 between Nampa and Caldwell — a top priority project for the chamber.

The Idaho Transportation Department last week received an additional \$86 million for the I-84 project, bringing the total allocated funding to about \$342 million, which is about \$12 million past the goal, said Jake Melder with the Idaho Transportation Department.

While funding has already been sought and approved for widening of I-84 from Franklin Boulevard interchange to Karcher Road in Nampa, work remains on widening the remaining

section of I-84 between Karcher Road and the city of Caldwell, which the Chamber urged legislators to make a priority for the representatives going into the legislative session.

According to COMPASS, Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho, between 2008 and 2015, there were 950 crashes between Franklin Boulevard in Nampa and Centennial Way in Caldwell, according to a document shared by the Chamber at the luncheon.

“It might take a decade for the entire project,” said state Rep. Christy Perry, R-Nampa.

EDUCATION

The Chamber also raised concerns about a lack of qualified teachers and will be requesting that the Legislature improve “promotion of access to student development opportunities, private/public partnerships, consolidation of services and equitable funding alternatives.”

The Chamber is also advocating for not increasing the financial burden on students as a result of improving opportunities, and keeping the cost of education affordable.

State Rep. Scott Syme, R-Caldwell, said schools aren’t seeing enough certified teachers.

“There aren’t many qualified applicants,” he said.

To solve the issue, Syme proposed employing more career and technical education teachers who would work under other certified teachers.

HEALTH CARE

Idaho ranks 49 in the country for the number of physicians per 100,000 people, 46 for primary care physicians per 100,000 people and 49 for the number of resident physicians per 100,000, according to documents provided by the Chamber.

The Chamber is asking that the state Legislature create more residency opportunities to attract more physicians to Idaho.

Rice reminded attendees of the new Idaho College of Osteopathic Medicine that is scheduled to begin classes next **fall**.

The school, which is a partner with Idaho State University, is expected to start classes in fall 2018. It's under construction at 1311 E. Central Drive in Meridian.

The new college will bring in increased residency opportunities to the area, Rice said.

The college announced last week it's accepting applications from prospective students. The medical school has secured affiliations with 32 hospitals, medical centers and health care organizations for students to start rotations in 2020, according to a press release.