

Idaho Statesman, Saturday, Feb. 21, 2009 – Staff report

Otter puts stimulus team together

Not wanting to jump ahead of the governor, lawmakers plan to study the impacts of the plan on Idaho spending.

Three former governors and five former state budget directors will serve on Gov. Butch Otter's special committee to recommend the best ways to spend Idaho's share of federal stimulus money. Former Govs. Phil Batt, a Republican, and Democrats John Evans and Cecil Andrus will be joined by five former leaders of the state Division of Financial Management.

All eight agreed to review and analyze proposals from state agencies and the private sector, Otter said this week.

"The wealth of experience and diversity of backgrounds that these distinguished statesmen bring to the table will help ensure that state government puts this taxpayer funding to work in the best, most efficient way for the benefit of all Idahoans," Otter said.

The five past administrators are Republicans Mike Brassey, Brian Whitlock and Jeff Malmen and Democrats Marty Peterson and Darrell Manning, Otter said in a news release.

Proposals to spend the money are due to the Division of Financial Management by noon Wednesday, March 4. The advisory committee will make its recommendations by Thursday, March 19.

Lawmakers to gather their own facts: The Legislature's budget committee will spend most of next week weighing impacts of the stimulus plan on state spending. The committee plans to delay budget setting by two weeks because of the prospect of new federal money.

"It's not our desire to get out in front of the governor, but to keep pace with him as he makes some very difficult decisions," said Sen. Dean Cameron, R-Rupert, the committee co-chairman.

Stimulus spending begins in Idaho: Otter signed an agreement allowing the federal government to add \$25 a week to every unemployment benefit check issued through the end of 2009.

That funding is part of the federal stimulus bill and will represent an additional \$1.2 million a week going into the economies of communities throughout Idaho.