

🏠 **Home** (<https://gov.idaho.gov/>) / [Press Releases](#) / [Idaho leads in economic rebound, Gov. Little highlights steps taken to strengthen economy](#)

Idaho leads in economic rebound, Gov. Little highlights steps taken to strengthen economy

Friday September 18, 2020
Boise, Idaho – As Idaho surges ahead in national rankings for economic prosperity, Governor Brad Little highlighted today the ways Idaho is accelerating a strong economic rebound amid the global pandemic.

“Idahoans have faced much hardship this year, but we have been working hard to ease the challenges and restore the prosperity Idaho had before the global pandemic,” Governor Little said.

A few rankings demonstrating Idaho’s strong economic position include:

- Idaho is #1 state for economic momentum (FFIS index)
- Idaho is #1 state for financial solvency (**Barron’s report** (<https://www.barrons.com/articles/is-your-state-in-financial-trouble-heres-how-all-50-stack-up-51598878298>))
- Idaho is #1 state in personal income growth over past year (**PEW** (https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/data-visualizations/2014/fiscal-50?utm_campaign=financeandeconomy_sfh&utm_source=twitter_states&utm_medium=social&utm_content=datavisualization_recessionrecovery___chart&utm_term=___cta#ind8))
- Idaho is #3 state for best employment rate (**U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics** (<https://www.bls.gov/web/laus/laumstrk.htm>))
- Idaho is #3 state for most CARES investment in broadband
- Idaho is in the top 10 states for unemployment trust fund balance (U.S. Department of Labor)

Idaho is in the top 10 states for rainy day fund balance (**NASBO** (https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/NASBO/9d2d2db1-c943-4f1b-b750-0fca152d64c2/UploadedImages/Fiscal%20Survey/NASBO_Spring_2020_Fiscal_Survey_of_States_S.pdf))

Governor Little said there are six specific ways Idaho is accelerating such a strong economic rebound. Full details for each step are included at the end of the news release.

- Idaho has responsibly managed the pandemic response.
- Idaho has prioritized direct support for Idaho businesses and citizens in the allocation of federal coronavirus relief funds.
- Idaho has cut red tape to ease the burden on businesses and strengthen the coronavirus response.
- Idaho has demonstrated fiscal conservatism in the state budget.
- Idaho has made historic investments in K-12 education during the pandemic to support students, families, and a strong economic rebound.
- Idaho has prioritized transparency and has engaged the business community and experts in all aspects of the coronavirus response.

Governor Little also said Idaho will remain in Stage 4 of the **Idaho Rebounds** (<https://rebound.idaho.gov/stages-of-reopening/>) plan for another two weeks. Under Stage 4, all Idaho businesses are open while protocols are followed to minimize transmission risk.

“In nearly all the statewide metrics categories we are seeing encouraging trends. However, our COVID hospitalizations statewide remain too high again to move out of Stage 4,” Governor Little said. “As temperatures start dropping, more transmissible moments will occur in the coming months. A primary reason we are able to achieve this remarkable economic position is because of our personal actions to slow the spread of coronavirus in our communities. I urge Idahoans, please do not let your guard down.”

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Ways Idaho is Accelerating a Strong Economic Rebound

#1: Idaho has responsibly managed the pandemic response.

- Idaho was one of the first states with a plan in place to safely and responsibly rebound the economy in stages. The Idaho Rebounds plan for strengthening the economy has drawn praise from President Trump and White House officials. Idaho managed to rebound the economy without jeopardizing healthcare capacity statewide, thanks to the good actions of Idaho citizens and businesses.
- Idaho set clear recommendations for businesses and others to mitigate COVID-19 spread early on.
- Idaho shifted from an initial statewide approach in our COVID-19 response to a localized approach, with public health boards and professionals, counties, and mayors playing a critical role in implementing measures appropriate for their local circumstances.
- Idaho directed millions to expand and expedite testing statewide and millions toward long-term care and correctional facilities to maximize safety in operations.

#2: Idaho has prioritized direct support for Idaho businesses and citizens in the allocation of federal coronavirus relief funds.

- Rebound Grants for Small Businesses – Idaho distributed more than \$75 million to 8,700 small businesses in cash payments up to \$10,000. The Idaho Rebound grants helped the smallest of Idaho businesses impacted by COVID-19, from the self-employed to companies with fewer than 50 employees.
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) for small business – Idaho supported approximately 4,000 businesses with their PPE needs to keep them open and their workers and patrons safe.
- Public safety initiative and lower property taxes – Idaho leveraged federal coronavirus relief funds to cover local public safety personnel salaries, ensuring local communities are prepared to respond to the pandemic and giving cities and counties the opportunity to pass on the savings to property taxpayers. The move provides up to \$200 million in property tax relief, or a 10-20-percent reduction in property tax bills this year across participating cities and counties.
- Keeping taxes low for businesses by making Unemployment Trust Fund solvent – Idaho small businesses and employers will not see huge automatic tax increases next year after a \$200 million transfer to keep the Idaho Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund solvent. Without the transfer, businesses would have to pay nearly double in unemployment insurance taxes next year. The move encourages more hiring.
- Getting workers back on the job – Nearly 32,000 Idahoans received Idaho’s Return to Work incentives, saving taxpayer dollars and benefitting more than 5,100 businesses that needed workers safely back on the job. The move helped put Idaho into the third spot for best employment rate in the country.
- Supporting Idahoans on unemployment – Idaho opted into President Trump’s Lost Wages program to ensure struggling families can continue to pay their mortgages and avoid debt, which helps stabilize consumer spending and prevent a deeper recession.
- Local government supporting businesses – Local governments were given the authority to direct \$94 million to support businesses at the local level as they see fit.
- Support for childcare businesses – Idaho made emergency grants available to childcare businesses so they could safely stay open to support children and Idaho’s workforce.
- Broadband investments – Idaho directed \$50 million toward more than 100 projects across Idaho that improve broadband infrastructure, equipment, and services to support student remote learning, telehealth, work-from-home opportunities, improved government services, and increased economic opportunities long-term. Most households served are in rural communities.
- ONE Idaho – Idaho initiated a campaign to encourage businesses and individuals to practice safety measures to ensure a strong economic rebound. Thousands took the ONE Idaho pledge.
- Addressing food insecurity and rental and utility assistance – Idaho made significant investments to address food insecurity and directed millions toward programs that provide rental and utility assistance for Idahoans in need.

#3: Idaho has cut red tape to ease burden on businesses and strengthen the coronavirus response.

- When we reduce regulatory friction, good jobs follow. Idaho became the least-regulated state in the nation in 2019 after 75-percent of regulations were cut or simplified in a matter of months. Governor Little’s Zero-Based Regulation executive order and other actions ensure regulatory rollbacks will continue – something Idaho businesses need during and long after the pandemic.
- Cutting red tape to strengthen coronavirus response – Within days of Idaho's first confirmed coronavirus case in March, Governor Little directed all state agencies to examine their rules, placing specific emphasis on increasing the state’s healthcare provider capacity and reducing barriers to healthcare access for Idaho citizens. The was more than 150 rules were waived. Governor Little took action to make the rule waivers permanent.

- Cutting red tape to increase telehealth services – Rule waivers prompted by Governor Little’s action increased telehealth services 40-fold during the pandemic. Private insurers also took steps to increase the accessibility of telehealth services.

#4: Idaho has demonstrated fiscal conservatism in the state budget.

Idaho ranks first in the nation for financial stability. Idaho has been able to lead the nation in financial solvency by:

- Limiting government spending – Shortly after the first coronavirus case was confirmed in Idaho, Governor Little asked state government agencies to do what businesses and families across Idaho were having to do – tighten their belts. Agencies were asked to cut spending and freeze hiring and any planned salary increases. Idaho was one of the first states to announce a formal holdback. Idaho state agencies just submitted the lowest budget request in years – with well under 2-percent growth next year. Under Governor Little’s direction, the “no frills” budget reflects limited growth in state government.
- Using conservative revenue forecasting – Idaho uses a conservative revenue forecast to provide a greater cushion at fiscal year-end. Idaho also moved the tax filing deadline to June 15, giving citizens more time to file their taxes but kept filings in the same fiscal year. Other states had to look for ways to cover shortfalls.
- Maintaining healthy rainy-day balances: While other states already withdrew billions from their rainy-day funds during COVID-19, Idaho strengthened its rainy-day funds with year-end transfers, preparing us well for the coming years.

#5: Idaho has made historic investments in K-12 education during the pandemic to support students, families, and a strong economic rebound.

- The pandemic has highlighted the significant role public schools play for students, families, communities, the economy, and the entire state. While most states face budget cuts across government, including education, Idaho is one of the only states that significantly increased funds for schools – directing nearly 11-percent more to K-12 education during the pandemic.
- Idaho directed \$122 million K-12 public schools for the safe reopening of schools and other COVID-related needs – for personal protective equipment, to bridge the “digital divide,” for COVID-19 testing of teachers and school staff, and other needs.
- Idaho directed \$99 million to K-12 education to ensure public schools experience zero reduction in funding.
- Idaho directed \$50 million to the Strong Families, Strong Students initiative to ensure parents can remain in the workforce while meeting the educational needs of their children.
- Governor Brad Little emphasized the expectation early on that students need to be back in their classrooms for in-person as much as possible during the pandemic. Idaho created a Framework for Reopening to guide local school officials in their decisions on reopening schools.

#6: Idaho has prioritized transparency and has engaged the business community and experts in all aspects of the coronavirus response.

- Economic Rebound Advisory Committee – Governor Little assembled a group of business leaders to recommend actions for a safe and strong economic rebound, with an emphasis on rapidly deploying resources to support Idaho businesses large and small. Nearly all the committee’s recommendations were implemented in a matter of weeks.
- Coronavirus Financial Advisory Committee – A broad group of leaders in government and business closely evaluate the best ways to allocate the federal coronavirus relief funds to support the pandemic response and promote a strong economic rebound. Every dollar spent of CARES funds is reported publicly at [Transparent.Idaho.Gov](https://transparent.idaho.gov).
- Coronavirus Working Group – Healthcare leaders and infectious disease experts routinely monitor coronavirus activity, healthcare capacity, and overall pandemic response, providing the Governor recommendations on appropriate actions to ensure the health and safety of Idahoans.