

Idaho to hold May primary by mail only due to coronavirus

By KEITH RIDLER March 30, 2020

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Idaho Gov. Brad Little and Secretary of State Lawrence Denney said Monday that the state primary will be held on May 19 as planned, but it will be conducted by mail with no in-person voting due to the coronavirus.

The Republican governor is urging all Idahoans eligible to vote to request an absentee ballot.

“While the coronavirus situation may change how we practice our right to vote in this primary election, it is important to keep our election dates in place,” Little said in a statement.

Officials said the change is necessary because there won’t be enough polling places or workers for people to vote in person.

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Denney, in a letter to Little on Friday, said officials at many of the facilities used for the 900 polling places told county clerks the facilities won’t be or may not be available for the May election. Denney also said polling place workers have concerns for their health and the health of voters.

The state primary will include a U.S. Senate seat, both U.S. House seats, and all 105 seats in the Legislature. Idaho held its presidential primary on March 10, with President Donald Trump winning among Republicans and former Vice President Joe Biden for Democrats.

Denney said his office’s website has been changed to allow voters to register and request an absentee ballot.

“Voting absentee is the right thing to do under these circumstances,” he said.

Senate President Pro Tem Brent Hill and House Speaker Scott Bedke, both Republicans, issued statements supporting the decision. Democratic leaders didn’t immediately respond to inquiries from The Associated Press.

Idaho has 325 confirmed cases of the virus and six deaths, according to a Johns Hopkins University tally on Monday afternoon.

Meanwhile, a northern Idaho lawmaker led a church service on Sunday despite a statewide stay-at-home order by Little last week to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

Republican Rep. Tim Remington, the pastor of The Altar Church in Coeur d'Alene, held the service, but it's not clear how many attended. Remington, in a YouTube video of the service posted online by the church, called it a skeleton crew.

Remington didn't immediately return a call from the AP on Monday. Coeur d'Alene is located in Kootenai County, which has 26 confirmed cases of the virus and community spread, meaning health officials can't determine the origin of some of the infections.

On Sunday, Remington told worshipers that the stay-at-home order violated their rights.

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“They have just showed everybody in this nation how because of a flu, OK, they can completely take away all of your First Amendment rights — the right to assemble and everything that belongs to that — they just annihilated,” he said.

Remington was appointed to the House of Representatives by the Little in late January after another lawmaker was expelled after being convicted of defrauding the U.S. government.

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in several weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death.

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