

March 29, 2007

GOVERNOR OTTER SIGNS HB 217, OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP CREATED

BOISE — Governor C.L. "Butch" Otter signed House Bill 217 into law this morning, creating the "Opportunity Scholarship." The scholarship, which had broad support in both legislative bodies, will provide "last dollars" to help Idaho students go on to post-secondary education.

Representative Dean Mortimer of Idaho Falls wrote a \$1,000 check at today's signing ceremony - the first private contribution to the Opportunity Scholarship fund.

"We're working hard to improve the academic preparedness of our high school graduates for whatever opportunities await them. Now this legislation and the generosity of folks like Dean give us a great start on ensuring that those who need it most are financially prepared to pursue those opportunities," Governor Otter said. "Because of this scholarship, more kids will have a chance to succeed."

The Opportunity Scholarship will require that an Idaho student apply for all available federal financial aid, as well as private and family support, before the State dollars engage. The Legislature has set aside \$10 million to be put in an endowment fund to begin earning interest to help fund the scholarship in the future. In the interim, the Legislature has approved \$1.925 million to pay for actual scholarships.

During debate on the floor of the House of Representatives, Dean Mortimer (R) District 32-B said as a way to repay those who helped him get his start at a junior college, he would make the first private contribution to the fund in the amount of \$1,000. "So much of what I have today is a direct result of higher education and the training I received. I think giving back is the right thing to do, and I encourage both private citizens and business to do the same," said Mortimer.

This Opportunity Scholarship is the direct result of the work of the 2006 Interim Committee on Community Colleges. As part of its November 2006 report, the committee recommended that the state "develop a policy and a program that expands availability of needs-based scholarships in order to increase students' accessibility to post-secondary education in Idaho." Governor Otter reflected that recommendation in his State of the State address to the Legislature.

The State Board of Education will draft rules to implement the new law, which goes into effect July 1, 2007.