

Following is Betsy Russell's reply to Dustin Hurst/Idaho Reporter story re: Capitol media corps being allotted space rent-free in Capitol building:

Dustin, the space is not ours; it belongs to Legislative Services, which chooses to make it available to us during the session. The Legislature long has done this as a matter of public interest; it's in the public's interest that the business of the legislative session gets reported to the public. Lobbyists, who are here to represent their own interests and clients, rent a room in the capitol and pay for it.

In the past, in addition to the rent-free press work space for use during the session, there were several news outlets that also rented year-round space in the Capitol: The Associated Press, the Idaho Statesman, Idaho Public Television and NPR-Boise State Public Radio (IPTV and NPR-BSPR are state agencies, and both had studio space as well as work space in the state capitol). In the Capitol renovation, those spaces were eliminated, and all press were consigned to the single session-only Capitol Correspondents work space. This shared space provides session-only workspace to more than 60 accredited capitol correspondents, including some who cover the session full-time, and others who drop in and out. Historically, the AP and the Statesman were given the months of the session rent-free for their rented spaces - they paid rent the other 9 months - to comply with the Legislature's longstanding policy of encouraging coverage of the session, though that changed some years ago (in their final years in the capitol, they paid rent year-round for their separate spaces).

While Idaho joined most states in seeing a drop in the size of its capitol press corps over the past decade or so, I was pleasantly surprised that our state's Capitol press corps has increased since the opening of the renovated Capitol. Capitol Correspondents pay dues of \$10 per year to help supply and operate the work space, including operation of a donated copier. Several news organizations have told me that if they had to pay rent in addition to their other costs to send a correspondent over to cover the session, they'd give it up; I'd hate to see that happen.

Betsy