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Idaho Representative - District 25



Legislative Update

February 25, 2011

After at least five hours of debate the Senate passed two of the three Superintendent Luna education bills. The third bill, Senate Bill 1113, has been pulled back to committee for some tweaking - possibly to pick up a vote to assure passage on the Senate floor. The two that passed today, with the seven Democrats joining eight Republicans, dealt with performance pay and employment.

I need to make a correction to last week's column: Senate Bill 1113, does not provide a mobile device to each 9th grader. The bill ensures that every Idaho public high school has a 1:1 ratio of students to computers (or mobile devices) in the 2013 fiscal year. School districts will have the flexibility of distribution to students (they don't have to be taken home). The legislature will provide the funding for repair, maintenance and support of the devices through the appropriation process if the bill passes.

New legislation, House Bill 197, has been introduced in the House Revenue and Taxation Committee by the Chairman Dennis Lake. This is very damaging legislation for four school districts: Blaine County, McCall-Donnelly, Avery and Swan Falls. The bill will have a hearing on **TUESDAY, March 1 (note day change)** at 9:00 am before the House Revenue and Taxation Committee. The legislation removes the authority for these districts to authorize budget stabilization levies without a vote of the people.

In 2006 the legislature in special session approved the Property Tax Relief Act. This legislation took the school maintenance and operation, M&O, levy off the property tax and replaced that funding with state general fund dollars primarily by raising the sales tax to 6%. In 2006 the above mentioned school districts had high property values, the highest levels of property wealth per classroom in Idaho. An accommodation was made for these four districts to allow them to continue the status quo since they received very little funding from the state. The four districts were and are primarily dependent on their funding from property taxes unlike the other districts in the state.

This legislation will renege on this "deal" of 2006 and requires that each district hold a supplemental levy election to approve these dollars that are already in place and being collected. Not only will the voters be asked to vote to approve this levy within the next 2.5 years (a cushion has been provided so the districts can hold more than one election), but once approved the voters will need to vote on this every two years.

For the Blaine district this amounts to about \$29 million dollars. Blaine schools are among the best in the state with smaller classrooms, International Baccalaureate, IB classes, AP and dual credit opportunities, and dual immersion classes. The District has completed an extensive strategic planning process focused on student learning. The school district is the largest employer in the county. The cost of living in Blaine County makes teacher recruitment difficult. There is a gap between teacher salaries and the price of housing for instance. Teacher salaries make up the majority of the school budget.

It is the objective of the sponsor and Republican House leadership to create an even playing field between districts receiving a majority of their funding from the state and these four districts "grandfathered" in 2006. Over half of the districts in the state have held and mostly passed supplemental levies as state support has been reduced. It is my observation that the Republican House leadership is not focused on what is "fair", but what they can do to hurt the education of children in these four areas. I urge you to contact legislators that you may know across the state to help Blaine, McCall Donnelly, Avery and Swan Falls school districts. Ask them to vote against House Bill 197.

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