

## Spread pain to teachers, and Nonini's happy

Jim Fisher

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This week, Bob Nonini, chairman of the Education Committee in the Idaho House, has offered two reasons he opposes the financial incentive for public school teachers to retire early. One of them is probably genuine.

That is the reason Nonini, R-Coeur d'Alene, stated Tuesday morning as he persuaded his committee to approve legislation at cross purposes with budget committee action to preserve the early retirement program.

"This is a going-home bill to where we can get these education issues resolved, we can spread the pain throughout the system," Nonini said. He went on to call the \$17,000 one-time incentive "a golden parachute" that he said "I have a hard time paying those people."

"Maybe they should just gracefully retire and go to the golf course," he added.

No Idaho teacher will be surprised by Nonini's bald expression of resentment toward "those people" in the classroom. It helps explain the motivation behind much of what he has done as a legislator, and probably helps explain why Speaker Lawrence Denney appointed him to head the Education Committee.

When speakers support the state's public school system, they put education supporters in charge of that committee. When they don't, they don't.

The other reason Nonini stated for trying to kill the early retirement program - that it costs more money than it saves - is a phony. As any school administrator will tell you, when veteran teachers at or near the top of a pay scale based on length of service retire, they are almost always replaced by beginning teachers at or near the bottom of the pay scale. And if the difference in pay does not exceed the \$17,000 incentive the first year, it soon will.

That's not the end of the savings, either. A teacher who retires early receives lower payments from the Public Employee Retirement System of Idaho than one who waits to retire. And those lower payments go on throughout the retiree's life.

Those are the reasons the early retirement system was begun in the first place. Other employers that have turned to such incentives, including the University of Idaho, have done so not to provide golden parachutes for others but to save money for themselves.

Does that mean no teachers would retire early without the incentives that cost Idaho \$2 million a year, as Nonini says they do? Of course not. But again, ask school administrators whether the incentive helps replace highly paid teachers with lowly paid ones.

If there's a cost to the incentive that is not returned in full, and then some, it is the loss of experience in the teaching ranks. Green teachers lack the seasoning, and in many cases the ability, of veterans.

Don't expect that loss to bother Nonini, though. After all, it also serves to spread pain throughout the system. -J.F.