

Going rogue with your taxes in Nampa

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For those who have been skeptical of the Idaho charter school movement, the day of judgment is here.

When they predicted years ago that charter schools would become a ploy to spend tax dollars on private, religious-based instruction, they were ignored if not ridiculed.

Vindication has arrived. Just as soon as the Idaho Public Charter School Commission gave the Nampa Classical Academy its imprimatur, the academy announced it would use the Bible as a text.

Don't the U.S. Constitution, the U.S. Supreme Court and the Idaho Constitution all say that's prohibited?

Prove it! say the folks in Nampa.

And if the charter school commission says no?

The Nampa Classical Academy is demanding its day in court.

When the charter school commission's program manager, Tamara Baysinger, pursued an audit of the school, the Nampa Classical Academy said Baysinger should be stopped because she could be prejudiced by the school's lawsuit.

The charter school commission is relying on Idaho's public records act to seek materials that would show whether the charter school was using religious texts in class. Usually, the people who resort to the public records act are nosy reporters or, in the case of schools, parents who are on the outside looking in.

Here, you have an agency that's supposed to hold a charter school accountable to the law and the taxpayers resorting to the whistleblower's toolbox.

Don't forget: The Nampa school leaders also are accused of violating the state's open meetings law by calling board sessions without first telling anyone about them. The school's board of directors has undergone dramatic changes.

The charter commission has issued three notices of defect - a first step toward closing the school. Just the same, the pace seems awfully slow. Compare it to a small, isolated rural Idaho school

that seeks autonomy. The instant it goes off the established path, it will answer to a diverse constituency and an elected school board. For good measure, throw in the courts, the American Civil Liberties Union, the state Department of Education, the Legislature and governor, the State Board of Education and the media.

Charters are insular by nature. Monitoring the 22 charters licensed through the state falls to the charter school commission and its enforcement arm now is on display.

In fairness, most of Idaho's charter schools follow the rules. But you'd think the charter school community would be more involved, publicly distancing itself from - if not policing - the Nampa school, if only to protect itself from guilt by association.

That goes double for Idaho schools Superintendent Tom Luna. This drama is unfolding in his hometown. Charter schools are one of his favorite causes. He wants more of them and thinks Idaho should lift the cap limiting the state to six new charter schools a year.

Where has he been?

One of Idaho's charter schools has gone rogue. From the ranks of the heretics comes the chant: We told you so. - M.T.