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Idaho State Senate

SENATOR EDGAR MALEPEAI **SENATE MINORITY LEADER**

SENATE DEMOCRATS FIGHT LUNA PLAN

Senator Edgar Malepeai, Minority Leader

Today, Senate bills 1108 and 1110 passed the Senate so today is a sad day for educators. Educators like Ronella Widdison of Rigby who wrote to me about “seeing the light of success in each student’s eyes.” Educators like Barbara Morgan who testified that “collaboration is key and all parties need to work together.” And educators like me who believe in the importance of building solid foundations. Without proper foundational support, our children cannot learn, our laws have no footing and our acts have no public support. It saddens me that my colleagues in the Senate would pass these laws knowing full well the extent to which our citizens are offended by Tom Luna’s mean-spirited plan.

I want to take a moment to address the parliamentary procedures Democrats employed today. We requested the bills be read at length because we believe that this legislation is being rushed through the Legislature and we had deep concerns that many of our fellow Senators intended to vote yes but had yet to read the bills in their entirety. This is too important to “grind out” as one of my colleagues suggested this morning. Another called the process a “waste of time.”

I want to make it completely clear that this is not a procedure we take lightly. The last time Senate Democrats asked for a bill to be read at length was the special session convened in 2006. At that time, we were very concerned about the impact of legislation that ultimately passed and led to the great Risch tax shift. Had that legislation been thwarted as we had hoped, \$132 million would not have been diverted from education funding and we would not be standing here today. My greatest fear is that we will be standing before you again in five years discussing the horrible consequences of today’s actions.

Senator Les Bock, Assistant Minority Leader

Under our current system, collective bargaining rights give teachers a voice in processes such as determining class sizes, working conditions, and school schedules – all of which impact a child’s school day in critical ways. SB1108 has, in effect, silenced that voice. Under our current system, teachers are insulated from dismissal based on capricious reasons, such as religion, ethnicity, or impossible to please, yet well-connected, parents.

The foundation of a school district’s success is the mutual respect developed between the district leaders and staff which is fostered by the interest-based bargaining process. Enactment of SB1108 will end decades of win-win negotiations that ensure our schools work well for students, teachers, administrators, and parents. Due process is not a special right. It’s what good employers provide to employees. Many private sector companies have adopted fair employment practices because they benefit the bottom line, improve employee productivity and morale, and simply because it’s the right thing to do.

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The passage of SB1110, while SB1113 which funds it gets revised in committee, means we just passed an unfunded mandate on our school system. Furthermore, pay for performance in the form of bonuses does not raise performance according to a study released in September, 2010 by the National Center on Performance Incentives at Vanderbilt University.

Senator Michelle Stennett, Minority Caucus Chair

Our educators are among our most valuable resources. They enter into the profession not for the money, but because they realize that what they do shapes the future of our state and our nation. Teachers work long hours, often giving up their weekends and personal time – not to mention dipping into their pocketbooks - to prepare lessons, grade papers, and ensure students don't fall behind.

One of the few things that our current system offers them is a right to collective bargaining and protection from unfair dismissal. Providing these protections is the least we can do for them. Our teachers are in the trenches every day, dealing with everything from overcrowded classrooms, varying parent expectations, and lack of resources. These teachers have had to deal with the impact of the budget shortfalls over the last few years and they have done so admirably. Many often spend their own money to provide necessary schools supplies so their students do not have to go without.

We as Democrats have always stood with teachers, and all working-class Idahoans, and here we are again today. Passing this legislation will undermine the quality of education in our state and set a horrible precedent for how we treat our employees. If we refuse to offer our teachers due respect in these protections, we risk losing them to other states that value education. Luna's plan proposes cutting over 700 teaching jobs from our state. We do not view legislation that adds this many people to our unemployment line while simultaneously increasing class sizes as a step toward any productive or legitimate reform.

In closing, I was struck by the headline in today's *Idaho Statesman*. It said "Star Power Here to Boost Luna." I'm sorry we don't have star power to offer. We only have people power and we stand with the people in strict opposition to this legislation.