

## Bill raises 'serious questions'

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By William L. Spence of the Tribune

Legislation would prohibit collective bargaining by all public-sector employees in Idaho

BOISE - Idaho Sen. Shirley McKague of Meridian introduced a bill Friday that would prohibit collective bargaining by all public-sector employees.

The prohibition would apply to public school teachers, firefighters and other public employees at all levels of state and local government.

McKague made it clear she wanted the bill introduced for discussion purposes. However, she held out the possibility it would be brought back next session.

Senate Minority Leader Edgar Malepeai asked who was sponsoring the legislation or who asked for it to be brought forward. McKague said only there had "been quite a bit of discussion amongst people I know. That's where the idea came up."

Sen. Chuck Winder, R-Boise, said the bill "comes as quite a surprise. I'm pleased to hear you'll be holding this bill to let people talk about it. I have a lot of serious questions I'd want answered."

McKague's bill indicates public employees would be free to join labor organizations, but it prohibits collective bargaining for rates of pay, hours of employment, work conditions or other employment matters. It would also be illegal to go out on strike.

"It is hereby declared to be the public policy of Idaho to promote harmonious, peaceful and cooperative relationships between public employers and their employees, and to protect the public by assuring effective and orderly operations of government," the bill reads. "Such policy is best effectuated by prohibiting collective bargaining in the public sector."

Alex Neiwirth, a field representative for the Idaho Association of Government Employees and Service Employees International Union, said the bill appears to be part of a national trend towards blaming public sector workers for the current fiscal situation.

"Coming into the session, I expected to see a laser-like focus on the budget," Neiwirth said. "I've been surprised by the way they're going after working families. It seems like they just want to blame public servants instead of focusing on the real issue, which is how to protect the vital services all Idahoans rely on."

Also this week, the House State Affairs Committee advanced two bills aimed at putting nonunion contractors on a more competitive footing with union shops, and the Senate Education Committee approved a school reform bill that would take away long-standing statutory protections that give teachers greater say in their work conditions.

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