

Ed board tries to disarm campus gun bill

In letters of opposition, members contend legislation is not a good move for Idaho's universities and colleges

Elizabeth Rudd/Lewiston Tribune

Members of the Idaho State Board of Education are adamant they don't want guns on college campuses, and they made that clear during a meeting Thursday.

It is the second time this month the state board has publicly stated its opposition to a proposed "guns on campus" bill that would allow some people to carry concealed weapons on college and university campuses. The bill has been approved by the Idaho Senate and is now being entertained by the Idaho House of Representatives.

Board members have expressed concerns about campus safety as a result of the bill, specifically how the changes would play out in an emergency. The board has also heard concerns from Idaho's university and college presidents about how the legislation cuts into the institutions' ability to work with local law enforcement to determine what is the best practice for individual campuses.

The state board took its opposition a step further Thursday, unanimously agreeing to send letters to the members of the House State Affairs Committee outlining why they do not think the bill is a good idea for the state's colleges and universities.

The House is taking public testimony regarding the proposed legislation starting at 8 a.m. Mountain time today in the Lincoln Auditorium in Boise.

Board members Milford Terrell and Rod Lewis agreed Thursday that it made sense to send a letter clearly outlining the board's opposition to legislators.

Terrell questioned whether the board should prepare a letter for Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter - in case the legislation makes it to his desk - requesting he veto the bill. Superintendent for Public Instruction Tom Luna said he felt that action would have more of an affect if the board waited until the bill actually made it to the governor's desk.

University of Idaho interim President Don Burnett told the board Thursday that the Idaho Universities Presidents' Council also remained united in opposition to the bill, with members saying it is not in the best interest of higher education.

"Simply shooting a target every five years is not adequate training to hand an active shooter," said Burnett, who is the chairman of the council.

The presidents' council is also concerned about the possible costs associated with the implementation of the bill on campuses, Burnett said. The council didn't present any definitive numbers to the board, but he said it "appears to be a substantial cost."

Boise State University President Bob Kustra said he has faculty and staff members who have expressed concern regarding their safety if this bill is passed. He said he knows the same kind of concern is present at colleges across the state.

"It has everybody on edge," he said. "It has everybody very nervous."

Burnett said the presidents' council doesn't see the bill as a Second Amendment issue, like many people are arguing.

"It is not genuinely a Second Amendment issue," he said.

Based on similar assertions, Lewis suggested - and other members unanimously agreed - to send a letter to the Idaho Attorney General's Office seeking an opinion about whether restricting guns on public college campuses is a violation of the Second Amendment right to bear arms.

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