

McKenzie would place a .357 in Room 222

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

It's been three years since Idaho refused to allow college students to carry concealed firearms on campus.

And what's been the reaction?

Have you heard students demanding state lawmakers reconsider?

No.

Has there been a rash of school violence to justify arming students?

Just the reverse. The homicide rate on the nation's college campuses is one-eighth of the national average. If a college student falls victim to violent crime, it most likely happened off campus.

What about the cops and campus security? Last time anyone asked law enforcement, they frowned on the idea. Assume an armed intruder invaded a classroom filled with armed students. How, police would ask, are they supposed to tell the difference between a bad guy with a gun and a good guy with a gun?

All they see is the gun.

And what have you heard from the people hired to manage Idaho's institutions of higher learning?

Last time, they argued against mixing concealed guns with a population of people in their late teens and early 20s who are dealing with new-found independence, financial stress, studies and relationships. Have they changed their view?

No.

But Sen. Curt McKenzie, R-Nampa, isn't listening to any of them.

He's fixated entirely upon the National Rifle Association.

And what the gun lobby wants, McKenzie and his GOP colleagues are only too eager to grant - especially in an election year.

True, McKenzie's 2014 version is slightly more restrained. Retired law enforcement officers could carry concealed weapons onto a campus.

No civilian younger than 21 could carry on campus and doing so requires an enhanced permit. In other words, the applicant must complete an eight-hour NRA training course.

Of course, how are authorities supposed to know whether the individual actually has an enhanced permit - or the less onerous version local sheriffs routinely dispense?

Law enforcement professionals will tell you it takes constant vigilance - training on a periodic basis - to maintain the discipline they need to check the adrenaline and maintain their reason in a shoot-don't-shoot situation.

What is a 21-year-old with eight hours of training over the course of his enhanced permit supposed to do?

Under the new bill, concealed weapons are off limits at dormitories, residence halls as well as forums - such as stadiums and auditoriums - seating more than 1,000 people.

But that still leaves classrooms.

Libraries, too.

A reasonable guess is that student union buildings might be included.

As would faculty offices.

Should McKenzie get his way, Idaho would join a handful of states - Colorado, Kansas, Mississippi, Oregon, Utah and Wisconsin - where politicians have intruded upon the judgment of state boards of education, university presidents and campus police.

Twenty-three have the good sense to leave these matters to the college authorities. Another 21 simply ban guns on campuses.

In 2011, it took a group of stalwart Idaho senators to block the bill.

The smart money says McKenzie and the NRA will prevail this year.

Unless, of course, ordinary Idahoans tell state lawmakers to stop playing politics with the well-being of their children who are attending college in the Gem State.

No half measures will do. We're talking about lawmakers who would do anything to avoid the NRA's wrath.

So pick up your phone.

Get on your email.

Organize public demonstrations too large to ignore.

That's what it's going to take.

Your state legislators won't stand up to the NRA.

Not unless you stand up first. - M.T.