

Security scramble won't defuse Legislature's bomb

Marty Trilhaase/Lewiston Tribune

Gather up these pieces of the guns on campus jigsaw puzzle.

See what you can make of them.

At Boise State University, President Bob Kustra is spending \$1.39 million getting ready for the law that allows anyone 21 and older who has the appropriate paperwork to carry a concealed firearm around campus - including classrooms - with the exception of venues serving more than 1,000 people and residence centers.

Kustra says he needs metal detectors at BSU's Albertsons Stadium - even though patrons now are subject to having their accessories searched. There's been no history of illegally armed people detained at these events. And BSU is employing a level of security more in line with the NFL than the NCAA.

Kustra wants 10 more security guards, three of whom will be armed - even though these campus cops lack the training and experience of sworn officers of the law working for a police department. As such, these security officers can do no more than witness behavior and report it. They have no authority to detain and arrest - which could become dicey when dealing with a citizen who may or may not be legally carrying a concealed firearm.

At Idaho State University, President Art Vailas is arming his campus security supervisor and eight full-time security guards with Glock 17 9 mm pistols.

Then there's the University of Idaho. There will be no metal detectors at the Kibbie Dome. President Chuck Staben says the devices are unnecessary.

He's also decided to rely upon the trained - and duly authorized - members of the Moscow Police Department to enforce the law.

Instead, Staben wants \$580,300 for such things as a surveillance system.

Nothing wrong with that, but cameras don't buy you security. They do virtually nothing to prevent problems. Once people become accustomed to cameras, they forget about them.

Surveillance comes in handy usually after the fact - when you're trying to sort who did what and when. Think Boston Marathon bombers.

Then there's Lewis-Clark State College President Tony Fernandez. He's doing none of that. No metal detectors. No extra surveillance. No armed private campus officers. He'll rely on the Lewiston Police Department. No extra money required.

"In the future, if we do require additional funds, we will consider that," Fernandez said during last week's State Board of Education session on campus security. "But at this time we don't."

Fine - except that's a 180-degree turn from what Fernandez said in March, just after the guns on campus bill passed: "We don't know to what extent those measures might be, but I'm certain there will be a price tag to them."

Configure all those pieces together and you get a picture of campus leaders grasping to deal with the unsolvable.

Metal detectors won't keep handguns out of classrooms, beer parties or even dormitories.

Expanded surveillance isn't going to change the fact that Idaho law is injecting concealed firearms into a population of people who are undergoing the stress of living away from home for the first time, facing academic and social pressures and living in an atmosphere of alcohol and drug experimentation.

Cops won't be much help when an armed citizen - with eight hours of training during five years - decides to be a hero. For one thing, they won't be able to tell the good guy with a gun from the bad guy with a gun. And whether it's Joseph Wilcox in Las Vegas earlier this year or Peter Husmann in Moscow seven years ago, the armed citizen is just as likely to wind up wounded or dead.

To Kustra, Staben and Fernandez, none of this is news.

Along with professional law enforcement officers, students, faculty and parents, they urged lawmakers against taking this step. They were right on the facts, but were no match for the political influence of the National Rifle Association.

The Legislature has handed them a bomb.

Whatever approach they take - making a big splash like Kustra, a more measured response like Staben or a minimalist stance like Fernandez - they can only hope it won't go off.

They can't defuse it. - M.T.