

Lawmakers cast doubt on higher education goal

By RYAN STRUYK, Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Some lawmakers cast doubt Wednesday on whether the state can reach its goal for 60 percent of Idaho's young adults to have a postsecondary degree or certificate by 2020.

State Board of Education Director Mike Rush told the House Education Committee that Idaho currently stands at 41 or 42 percent.

Committee Chairman Reed DeMordaunt said that the current trend doesn't leave lawmakers feeling very optimistic.

"That doesn't give us a lot of hope for hitting the 60 percent goal," he said. "Why should we be hopeful?"

Rush responded by saying the state has "a shot" at achieving the 60 percent mark on time, but reaching the goal a year or two late would still be a success.

The number of young adults with associate's degrees or higher has climbed about 5 percent since 2005 but has held roughly steady since 2011.

It's difficult to measure how many people have one-year certificate, Rush said, since the census doesn't ask. He said that number is likely around 6 or 7 percent.

Republican Rep. Lance Clow of Twin Falls pointed out that even if all current high school seniors earn a postsecondary degree, they will be too young in 2020 to be included in the goal's 25- to 34-year-old age range.

Clow wondered whether the goal should be changed.

"I don't want people in six years saying look how far you fell short of attaining this goal," he said. "It would become a point of criticism rather than a point of accomplishment."

Rush said that some college graduates have been leaving the state for higher salaries. Also, adults in the workforce have not left their jobs to pursue short-term professional certificates, he said.

He pointed at other several other states that have already passed Idaho's goal as evidence that the state can reach its mark too.

"The facts are we need more people with postsecondary credentials," Rush said. "It doesn't make sense for me to redefine a goal that would be less than that."

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