

# Tie a blue ribbon round that old man's committee

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**Lee Rozen/Moscow-Pullman Daily News**

Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter wants to appoint a task force to set out a five-year plan for higher education in Idaho.

He will ask it, "How can we improve our higher education efforts?"

He wants the task force to figure out how to increase the portion of Idahoans with either college degrees or certification in an advanced skill to 60 percent. It's somewhere around 40 percent now.

Gee, that's a wonderful idea.

But given the history of such blue-ribbon committees at all levels of government, it is unlikely it will do more than give Otter the ability to say, "Well, I tried."

First, such committees seldom generate ideas that reach far beyond giving each member's college or university more money.

When they do, those ideas can be ignored by the governor - or more likely resisted by the ultra-conservative Idaho Legislature. Otter has exhibited little appetite for the bully pulpit and the deal-making that's needed in such a situation.

Besides that, there's a strong streak of anti-intellectualism throughout much of the state outside Moscow, Boise and Pocatello.

Look at the relative portion of the state budget spent on education in Washington, where there is heavy political pressure to do even more, and Utah, a church-dominated society, compared to Idaho.

These figures are from a couple of years ago, but there's no reason to think they don't remain generally true today.

In Idaho, the state collects about \$3.7 billion in taxes and gets another \$3.9 billion in federal funds - totaling \$7.6 billion - and spends about 32.1 percent of that on K-12 and higher education combined.

In Utah, the state collects about \$6.3 billion, gets \$6.7 billion from the feds - totaling \$13 billion - and spends 38.4 percent of that on education.

In Washington, the state collects about \$19.4 billion, gets \$18.2 billion from the feds - totaling \$37.6 billion - and spends 47.1 percent on education.

The point seems clear. Idaho isn't investing in K-12 and higher education at nearly the rates that a couple of neighboring states are.

We doubt a high-level commission will change that.