

Why take Idaho's legislators so seriously? We don't

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

Another national publication has taken Idaho's Legislature seriously.

The fools.

This time, it's the Weather Channel, which contends Idaho lawmakers stand alone among their colleagues in deep-sixing the teaching of human-caused climate change in the public schools.

Elsewhere, legislatures in six states - Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Oklahoma, West Virginia and Wyoming - were less successful.

The Weather Channel adds that state boards of education in Texas and West Virginia had some success in watering down criteria for teaching climate change science, however.

Only in Idaho will you find a freshman legislator, state Rep. Scott Syme, R-Caldwell - a real estate broker, farmer and retired Army veteran - empowered by a state constitutional amendment that enables him and the House Education Committee to substitute their judgment for a panel of 19 scientists, science teachers and educators as well as the State Board of Education.

House Education Committee members dropped five sections about climate change from a temporary updating of the public school science standards last adopted in 2001 and updated in 2009. Nothing could dissuade them - not an informal forum on climate change that drew the largest audience of the legislative session nor their counterparts on the Senate Education Committee.

Now the process to craft a final rule is underway. And in just about every Idaho community where the public has been consulted - including Lewiston, Coeur d'Alene, Boise, Idaho Falls, Twin Falls and Fort Hall - the feedback has been virtually unanimous in favor of science and in opposition to ideological infiltration.

Of course, the same group of lawmakers will get the final word come next January.

But here's a little secret about the way Idaho handles these things:

Nobody much cares what the legislators say.

Remember when a few of them got the bright idea to nullify the federal Constitution?

Or when they threatened to dismantle child support enforcement, contending it might trigger Sharia law?

How about the periodic attempts to claim title to millions of acres of federal property within the state?

After they rattle their legislative sabers, they retreat. What other choice do they have? It's not as if they have the ability to make any of these things happen.

Here, we're talking about something that is less than meets the eye. This so-called rule involves minimal science standards. With or without it, local educators are free to do whatever they want. They can strive to do more than the minimum.

In other words, there is no rule coming out of Boise that will prohibit a science teacher from doing her job.

Nothing can stop her from conveying to her classrooms current scientific knowledge about climate change and what's causing it.

Likewise, there is nothing the state Legislature can do to stop a school board from making certain the students attending science classes are being taught science, not science-lite.

And when it comes time to purchase science textbooks, good luck finding one reputable publication that fails to note climate change - and the human role in creating greenhouse gases - is established science.

True, political mischief in Boise opens the remote possibility of perhaps one of Idaho's 115 school districts or a few of its some-odd 40 charter schools may be tempted to distort climate change curriculum. No student deserves to be victimized by a deliberate misinformation campaign.

So the same parents who sounded off to the State Department of Education last week need to maintain vigilance with the people running their local schools.

Still, the fact of the matter is Idahoans should pay no more attention to legislative directives about the teaching - or the lack thereof - about climate change than if those same politicians decided to interfere with lessons about slavery in the United States or the history of the Vietnam War.

Virtually all of Idaho's kids are going to learn where climate change comes from - and what to do about it.

And all those ideologically driven and uninformed lawmakers? What about them?

Ask a veteran educator and here's what you're likely to hear: "We'll just teach around them." - M.T.