

THE CARLSON CHRONICLE

“Red sun in the morning“

Those supporting repeal of the Luna/Otter Educational “Reform” package in general, and the Idaho Education Association, in particular, might want to take note of comments and attitudes gleaned from a recent sit down with three teachers at St. Maries High School.

The comments not surprisingly reflected a similar earlier sit down with a teacher in the Challis School District.

All four said without hesitation they intended to vote to repeal the three items on the ballot in November. Like many they are offended by the lack of due process alone. In their eyes it was a betrayal of trust for Governor Otter and State Superintendent Luna to have campaigned for re-election in 2010 and not to have said word one to any involved in education about what they were planning to introduce a scant seven weeks later when the 2011 Legislature convened.

To them it was deliberately deceitful, reflecting a lack of trust by these officeholders in teachers’ ability to thoughtfully analyze and provide valuable input into ideas for reform. To have it steamrolled through a compliant State Legislature was just adding insult to injury. Invoking the “emergency clause” to force early implementation before all the unintended consequences had been worked out was just the frosting on the cake.

Neither did it come as a surprise when the early contracts regarding implementation as well as providing technology and software came from firms high on the contributors list of those giving to the Otter and Luna campaigns. You can bet not only do they feel betrayed; they also feel they’ve been lied to and their role as teachers denigrated.

They watch with bemusement as the Legislature wrangles with Luna’s pathetic attempt to buy back their good graces by restoring funds for pay cut from last year’s budget. They look at the slick brochure produced by the State Superintendent and know a campaign spin job when they see one. They think the “Students Come First” is nothing but a cynical slogan by two politicians who in their view care little for students and even less for teachers.

One would think these four would be shock troops ready to hit the battlements hard in the run-up to November----but one would be wrong. None of them belong to the IEA, and two resigned from the union last year.

Why? In their view the union is off message more concerned about protecting the weakest link rather than offering its support for reasonable reforms reflecting input from and work with teachers and their hands on knowledge of what helps students most.

Yes, they intend to vote no in November, but that does not mean they will campaign actively for repeal. They want to see a message and a strategy that looks forward, not one that looks back. They want the union to understand the repeal is not about bad legislation and bad policy; it's about not trusting teachers to be a constructive part of planning and complementing collaboratively established change.

They want to see a message that says "Trust Teachers to Know What's Best for Kids in the Classroom," not a message that says protect union rights and the need for unions to protect incompetence in the ranks.

They understand that in order for the IEA and repeal supporters to obtain the kind of money it will take to defend against the support the reform ads garner that will be bought and paid for by vendors and suppliers who stand to gain from selling the instruments of reform, the Idaho campaign will have to tie into some of the national "support the union" campaigns. They hope however those running the Idaho repeal campaign will be smart enough to "Idahoize" the campaign here.

They also want to see their community awarding the respect that is their due for serving in a state near the bottom of the list when it comes to per pupil support costs in the nation. They feel they have chosen to take much less in pay in exchange for living in a great place, but there is little appreciation for how much many spend out of their own pockets for supplies and other items.

The sad irony is this is a classic Catch-22. If teachers are NOT galvanized enough to speak up and actively campaign there's a real risk that others in the community will read that as indifference to the outcome and in effect resignation to the inevitability of these misbegotten pieces of legislation being fully implemented no matter how poorly written or unclear they are.

Right now, they are standing on the sidelines, waiting to see if the IEA gets it. "Sailor, take warning."