

It's about time

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

CHEERS ... to University of Idaho President Chuck Staben. The question is so obvious: Why do so many Idaho high school graduates fail to continue their education?

Staben learned that no one has asked them.

What an oversight.

Here you have a state that wants 60 percent of its young adults, ages 25 to 34, attaining some kind of post-high school education by 2020. For more than five years, the J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Foundation waged a campaign imploring young Idahoans to "go on" toward the education they'd need in a 21st-century global economy.

Yet, the state is headed in the wrong direction. In the high school class of 2014, only half of the students pursued more schooling. Four years ago, the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems ranked Idaho's 2010 "go-on" rate last in the country.

So Staben has assigned the UI's James A. and Louise McClure Center for Public Policy Research to survey high school students both in the spring and then in the fall.

The results will be out early next year.

When adults look at this problem, they blame culture. Three-quarters of Idaho's parents never completed college. It's harder for their own children to break the barrier.

Or they question the message. Clearly the idea that a high school diploma alone disqualifies you from 61 percent of the new jobs in Idaho isn't working.

Sometimes they cite an improving economy that lures students into working and earning money now rather than deferring incomes in lieu of classes.

Or it could be Idaho's 80 percent boost in tuition has priced college education beyond the reach of its relatively low-wage families.

What if the students bring up:

- Fear of the unknown?
- Lack of information about career opportunities?
- Inadequate counseling in the public schools?

This tells you Staben is serious about his pledge to expand the UI's enrollment by 50 percent within 10 years.

But this is smart for another reason. It gives the McClure Center a leadership role in conducting public opinion research.

JEERS ... to Nez Perce County Commissioners Doug

Havens, Bob Tippet and Doug Zenner. Wrap your head around this: Lewiston and Nez Perce County taxpayers are paying for both sets of lawyers in the county's dispute over urban renewal with the city.

Thursday, the Tribune's Joel Mills dug up the latest bills -

\$62,449 for the county's legal team and \$55,516 for the attorneys representing the Urban Renewal Agency.

That means you're \$23,000 deeper in the hole than you were just six weeks ago - when the total stood at about \$95,000.

Don't blame the city or the URA. They offered the county more than half a loaf by proposing to close down two districts early after completing two projects - 18th Street in North Lewiston and extension of Nez Perce Terrace Drive to Gun Club Road.

That would be worth more than \$400,000 a year to the county - which started this lawsuit because it needs money.

Not only did the county officials refuse to settle, but they have now doubled down. As Mills noted, the county expanded its legal targets and range of arguments. Whatever the outcome of a Sept. 17 hearing, these points have added more complexity to resolving the case.

To you, that's called time and money.

To lawyers, it's known as billable hours.

CHEERS ... to Idaho schools Superintendent Sherri Ybarra. She's not letting up on her fellow Republicans in the Legislature or Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter. Next year, she wants them to boost public education spending \$110.4 million, or 7.5 percent.

That's on top of the \$101 million, or 7.4 percent, increase approved this year.

That kind of dogged commitment is what it's going to take to begin reversing years of neglect that have reduced public education's share of Idaho's personal income by 25 percent since the turn of the century.

The big number shows Ybarra intends to be the advocate for public education her predecessor, Tom Luna, never was.

And some of the details indicate she's been listening to people in the field. For instance, Ybarra's budget would increase so-called discretionary funds - money local schools spend on everything from utilities to textbooks - to the pre-recession level of \$25,696 per classroom. Does it restore all the buying power schools have lost in that time?

No, but it's another step in the right direction.

JEERS ... to Idaho Technology Council President Jay Larsen. As the voice of technology in Idaho, you'd think Larsen would be savvy enough to recognize a rather glaring omission among the people headlining the sixth annual Idaho IT Symposium next month at Boise State University.

Here's a clue.

Look over the list of speakers, including Olympic champion Dick Fosbury of Ketchum.

Do you see anybody without a Y chromosome?

Didn't think so.

Same thing for the people who organized these sessions.

There's not one woman among the organizations involved - among them Simplot, the Technology Council, the city of Boise, Canyon County, BSU or the Idaho Department of Lands - who might have something to contribute?

Really?

No wonder the Institute for Women's Policy Research ranked Idaho 50th among the states and Washington, D.C., for women's earnings and employment.

Here we have Idaho - again.

CHEERS ... to Idaho prisons Director Kevin Kempf. He's closing the so-called "dry cells" - those without toilets, sinks, mattresses and other furnishings - that have been used to isolate inmates.

He's also reviewing all of the state's restrictive-housing practices.

Sure, a lawsuit over prison health care highlighting the use of those dry cells may have prodded Kempf along. Too often, those cells were used to manage mentally ill inmates - at a time when prisons and jails have become de facto mental health hospitals.

This shows Kempf is attuned to the vicious cycle taking place in America's prisons. The untreated mentally ill end up in the criminal justice system where their illness is managed, not treated. And when released back into their communities, they're often in even worse shape.

Closing the dry cells doesn't solve all the problems. But Kempf is on the right track. - M.T