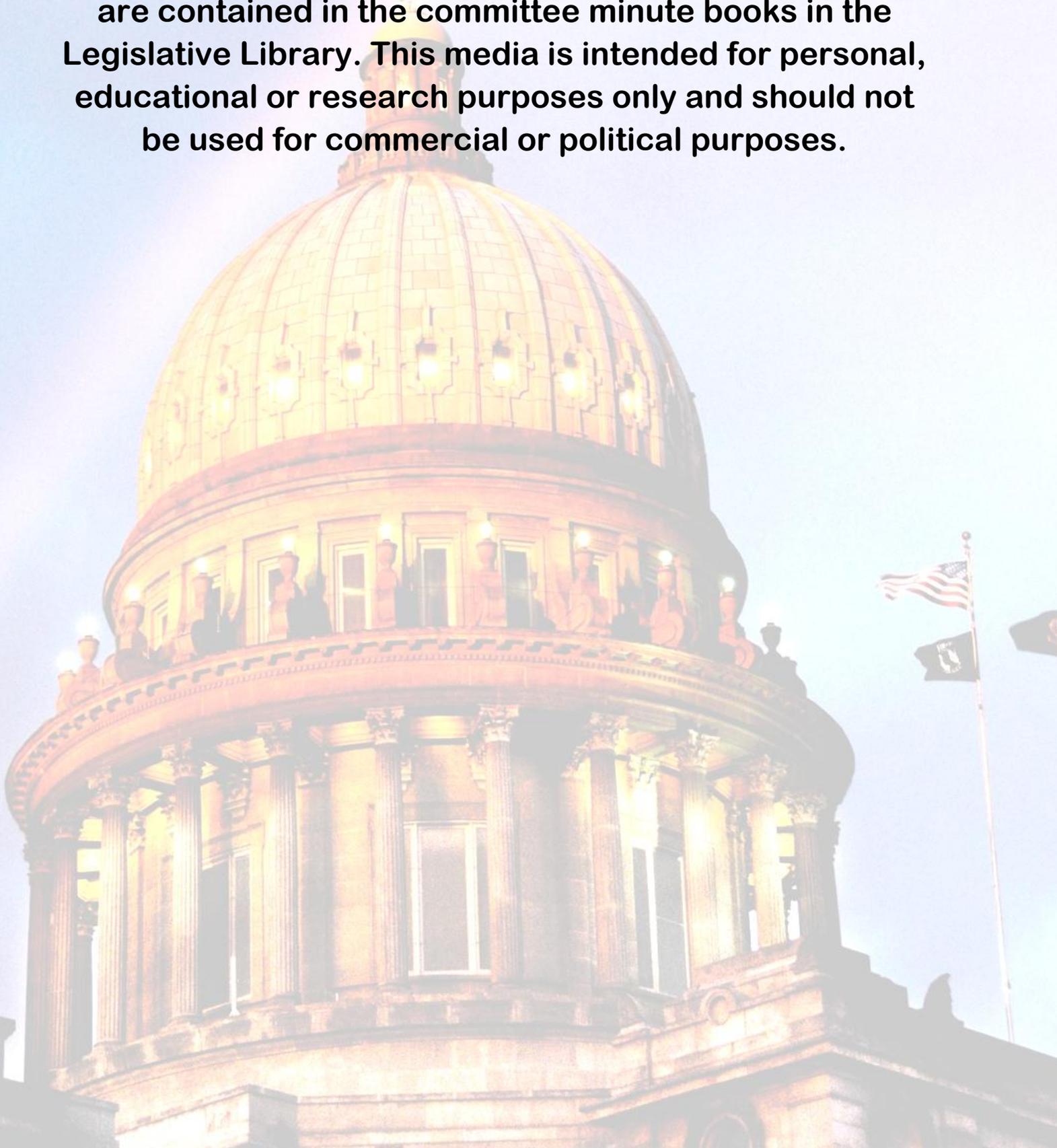


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MINUTES
SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

DATE: Tuesday, February 23, 2016
TIME: 3:00 P.M.
PLACE: Room WW55
MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Mortimer, Vice Chairman Thayn, Senators Nonini, Patrick, Souza, Den Hartog, Anthon, Buckner-Webb, Ward-Engelking
ABSENT/ EXCUSED: None
NOTE: The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

Senator Mortimer
Chair

Noreen Chen
Secretary

ATTACHMENT 4

Testimony before the Idaho Senate Education Committee given on 1/13/16 by
Briana LeClaire, Executive Director, Idaho Federation of Independent Schools.

Contact: briana@idfis.org (208) 724-6311

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. My name is Briana LeClaire, and I am the executive director of the Idaho Federation of Independent Schools, a statewide private school organization. Our members include Holy Rosary Catholic School and the Watersprings School in Idaho Falls, The Alzar School in Cascade, Classical Christian Academy and Genesis Prep in Post Falls, Holy Family Catholic School, Lake City Junior Academy and LAM Christian in Coeur d'Alene, St. Edward's and Lighthouse Christian in Twin Falls, Nampa Christian, The Ambrose School, Cole Valley Christian and Sheridan Academy in Meridian, and Bishop Kelly, Calvary Christian School and Riverstone International School in Boise. Our members belong to the Federation to protect their freedoms to educate children well, and to promote private schools and private school choice.

The demand for private schooling in Idaho exceeds its availability. A school choice survey conducted by the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice revealed that the first choice of 27 percent of Idahoans is a private school. However, only **three** percent of Idaho's k-12 students are enrolled in one.

A survey of the schools showed that between 2500 - 5000 seats are available right now in Idaho's private schools, and that 94 percent of private schools award financial aid.

Several thousand open seats in schools Idahoans clearly prefer show it's not possible for many Idahoans to pay for school twice: once through taxation and again through tuition. This is even though median tuition for private elementary schools is \$3,550 and median high school tuition is slightly more than \$5,000.

Yesterday you heard from Tony Bennett, former Indiana Superintendent of Public Instruction, who emphasized the importance of school choice when it comes to raising student achievement. Right now, too many good schools are off the table as choices for most Idahoans.

Our hope is that the State of Idaho will grow the funding of students, not systems, beyond the public charter sector. The Legislature should extend school choice to meet demand through vouchers, education savings accounts, tax credit tuition scholarships, and other mechanisms. If the Idaho Constitution is the problem, particularly the part known as the Blaine Amendment, then please fix it.

At the college level, public money follows the student to private schools, including religious schools, all the time. A Pell Grant is nothing more than a federal voucher, and a college student can take his to the University of Idaho, or NNU, or BYU-Idaho, or just about anywhere he pleases.

Through fate, some children already are positioned to attend the k-12 schools their parents desire. Maybe they're born into a family of means. Maybe they're on one of the full-ride sponsorships Cole Valley Christian School gives to current and former residents of the City Light Home for Women and Children. Perhaps they're able to take advantage of other private schools' financial aid programs.

But why should a child have to be lucky in order to attend the school that's best for him? It should be public policy for all Idaho schoolchildren to have access to the education suiting them best, even if it happens to take place in a religious or secular private school.

Thank you, and I welcome your questions.

Attachment 5

Testimony before the Senate Education Committee

January 13, 2015

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee--my name is Jane Wittmeyer, and I am the Manager of the Coalition of Idaho Charter School Families. Thank you for providing time today to allow me to speak to the Committee regarding the Coalition and the issues of importance to the members of the Coalition.

The Coalition, which is a 501(c) (4) entity, is made up of parents, students, families, teachers and supporters of Idaho Charter Schools. It was formed in 2006 in support of the effort to expand public school choice, provide public school alternatives and improve education in Idaho. You may remember us as the group that holds the large Rally on the Statehouse steps. It has always been the Coalition's Signature event to celebrate school Choice in Idaho and to urge Idaho's Legislature to support and expand school Choice in the state. We invite you to the 2016 Capitol Steps Rally on January 27. We anticipate over 1500 students, parents, teachers, and other Idahoans who support school choice. We would love to see you all there!

The mission of the Coalition is to promote and advocate for public policy that furthers the advancement of charter schools and the innovations in education they represent. The Coalition works to ensure that every Idaho student has equal access to the option of enrolling in a public charter school whether it offers instruction in a traditional classroom or a virtual setting.

Charter Schools are pioneers and innovators, they are open to all students, they appeal to teachers because of the opportunity to innovate, and they meet parents' needs by providing public education choice. They are publicly funded--Charter schools are public schools. And importantly, Charter schools honor the right of parents to make informed choices about their child's education by tying state education money to the child, not to the neighborhood school.

As this committee and the larger legislative body act to improve K through 12 education in Idaho, please keep a few things in mind:

There are many things the Idaho Legislature could do to help support school choice options in Idaho. We support the following:

- **Legislation that provides for funding that follows the child so each Idaho Student has equal funding—for instance, enrollment timing, is an example of funding needing to follow the child for virtual programs, alternative schools and many rural districts.** Funding needs to reflect the mobility of the student population. Currently, the funding is front loaded, and if a student moves, for whatever reason, after the first 10 weeks, the school that receives the student is severely underfunded--which unfairly punishes both the receiving school and the child. These schools are safety nets for a mobile student population. Safety net schools should be encouraged to educate these students and should be fully funded for their efforts. The real losers under the current funding approach are the students.
- Increased facilities funding for charter schools;

- Creation of a revolving loan fund to assist with facilities costs;
- The right to participate in school bond elections alongside other public schools;

Mr. Chairman I want to personally thank you and the other members of the Committee for providing time in the Committee schedule for the voices of school choice representatives. I am a poor substitute for the parents and students but I will be bringing them to the Capitol again this Session to meet Committee members and let their voices be heard. These are busy parents as they are very involved in the education of their children. While legislators are very used to seeing representatives of establishment education groups in the Committee room on a regular basis, some of the most important components of the education system, parents and students, are too often forgotten, over looked or marginalized.

On behalf of the Coalition Board and its members, I thank you for your time and attention.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my remarks.