

MINUTES
SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

DATE: Monday, March 04, 2024

TIME: 3:00 P.M.

PLACE: Room WW55

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Lent, Vice Chairman Toews, Senators Den Hartog, Nichols, Carlson, Herndon, Lenney, Ward-Engelking, and Semmelroth

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.

CONVENED: **Chairman Lent** called the meeting of the Senate Education Committee (Committee) to order at 3:00 p.m.

HCR 25 **HOLOCAUST EDUCATION - States findings of the Legislature and encourages the Idaho State Department of Education to review and consider the adoption of age-appropriate Holocaust education in school districts and public charter schools. Representative Mickelsen** spoke to **HCR 25**. She said that the impetus behind the bill was to counter growing Holocaust denialism and to set standards regarding Holocaust instruction in Idaho schools. **Representative Mickelsen** introduced Representative Ilana Rubel to tell her personal story about the Holocaust. **Representative Rubel** shared that she was Jewish and that her family was persecuted during the Holocaust. She voiced concern about the rise in Holocaust denialism and ignorance of Holocaust history. **Representative Rubel** introduced Representative Wheeler to explain **HCR 25**. **Representative Wheeler** commented that through the legislative process he and Representative Mickelsen received feedback to include other persecuted groups in the Holocaust standards, as well as information about the circumstances and policies that led to the genocide. He shared that a conversation they had with the Consul General of Israel was very powerful and helped drive **HCR 25**.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Lenney** asked for insight into what was currently taught in Idaho schools regarding the Holocaust. **Representative Wheeler** replied that there was a patchwork of instruction. He explained that this inconsistency was one reason for the resolution to adopt standards regarding Holocaust history instruction. He pointed out that local districts retained control and chose their own curriculum.

Senator Nichols asked Debbie Critchfield, Superintendent of Public Instruction, whether Holocaust history was taught in Idaho schools. **Superintendent Critchfield** said that there were strands of Holocaust history in a variety of social studies topics. However, she pointed out that all standards were on a 5-year review cycle at which time topics were easily added or removed at the discretion of the review committee and leadership. She said that **HCR 25** established standards that remained despite who served on a committee or in leadership at the Department of Education in the future. **Senator Nichols** asked what the next steps were if the resolution passed. **Superintendent Critchfield** explained the Department of Education was currently in the cycle to review social studies standards which was ideal timing to guide and direct committee members on the standards. She added that the standards were then approved by the legislature in 2025 and sent to the school districts.

Senator Lenney asked why the focus was on one genocide and not on other world genocides or on the teaching of genocide in general. **Representative Wheeler** replied that **HCR 25** was a product of timing and a response to concerns expressed regarding Holocaust instruction.

TESTIMONY: **Norma Staaf** testified in favor of **HCR 25**. **Ms. Staaf** shared that she was the daughter of a World War II refugee and a history teacher. She expressed shock at the rise of Holocaust denialism and anti-Semitism in Idaho in recent years. She asserted that instruction about the Holocaust in the broader context proposed by this bill helped children to learn critical reasoning skills. She pointed out that those who do not know history were doomed to repeat it.

Written testimony submitted online from Ms. Staaf appears in Attachment 1.

MOTION: **Senator Ward-Engelking** moved to send **HCR 25** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Toews** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

PRESENTATION: The State Board's Open Education Initiative. **Dr. TJ Bliss**, Chief Academic Officer, Office of the State Board of Education, provided an update on the State Board's Open Education Initiative (Attachment 2). **Dr. Bliss** explained that the State Board of Education had a priority to increase access and affordability for students in higher education. One strategy that the State Board of Education and the legislature embraced was to decrease the cost of instructional materials. He shared that the State Board of Education adopted a policy called Instructional Materials Access and Affordability in 2021 which required 4-year institutions in Idaho to implement a plan to increase the access and affordability of instructional materials. The legislature appropriated funding in 2022 to support the initiative. He reported that the 4-year colleges made great progress in the effort to increase access and affordability by the establishment of institutional committees to steer cost saving strategies, systematic course markings, the development of zero-cost or very low cost pathways, and the inclusion of affordability efforts in the faculty tenure and promotion process. He shared a breakdown of the investment by the State of Idaho and the cost savings to students to date.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Nichols** asked Dr. Bliss if he expected more funding to be necessary. **Dr. Bliss** stated that the 4-year institutions spent more efficiently than anticipated. He added that funding from the original appropriation remained and that the institutions planned to develop more zero-cost or low cost pathways with it. He expressed the desire to observe as the institutions spent the available funding over the next one to two years. He said that he welcomed future investment but that it needed to be strategic.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Lent** adjourned the meeting at 3:38 p.m.

Senator Lent
Chair

Lisa Stein
Secretary