

MINUTES
SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

DATE: Thursday, March 11, 2021

TIME: 3:00 P.M.

PLACE: Room WW55

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Thayn, Vice Chairman Crabtree, Senators Den Hartog, Woodward, Lent, Johnson, Cook, Ward-Engelking, and Nelson

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 Thayn** called the meeting of the Senate Education Committee (Committee) to order at 3:01 p.m.

MINUTES APPROVAL: **Senator Ward-Engelking** moved to approve the Minutes of February 24, 2021; March 2, 2021; March 3, 2021; and March 4, 2021. **Senator Cook** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

GUBERNATORIAL REAPPOINTMENT: **Vice Chairman Crabtree** moved to send the Gubernatorial re-appointment of Dr. Linda Clark, to the State Board of Education Commission, to the floor with the recommendation that she be confirmed by the Senate. **Senator Lent** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

H 248 **Relating to Public School Funding; Adds to Existing Law to Provide That a School District or Public Charter School May Use Part of Its Salary-Based Apportionment to Pay for Its Employees to Be Covered by the State Employee Health Insurance Plan. Representatives Rod Furniss and Ryan Kerby** outlined the bill and handed out supporting documentation (see Attachments 1, 2, 3).

DISCUSSION: **Senator Lent** asked how many states offer insurance plans like the one outlined in **H 248**. **Representative Furniss** said 24 other states currently offer insurance plans to teachers, administrators and staff similar to the plan in **H 248**. Three states have made joining their State insurance plan mandatory for teachers and staff. He also said the four largest districts in Idaho would most likely not join this plan since they are self-funded. **Senator Nelson** asked about the equity of the plan since it seems that teachers, administrators, and classified staff will get coverage, but the larger share of the premiums will be paid by the teachers. **Representative Furniss** said the largest portion is paid for by the teacher career ladder and teachers get better coverage and more money in their take-home check.

Senator Ward-Engelking asked how retired teachers would be affected if the current insurance plan they use goes away. **Representative Furniss** said the decision would be up to the school districts to decide coverage for retired teachers. **Senator Ward-Engelking** said this bill seems to remove collective bargaining, which would make joining the State insurance plan mandatory. **Representative Furniss** said he met with many school superintendents and said none of them voiced any issue with collective bargaining. **Senator Ward-Engelking** said taking money from the teacher career ladder seemed detrimental to attracting new teachers. **Representative Furniss** said money used to pay health insurance premiums needs to be ongoing money; COVID-19 money is one-time money.

Senator Woodward asked for clarification about the unequal compensation and benefits between teachers. It seems that **H 248** was asking Teacher A, with no spouse and no children, and Teacher B, who has four children and a spouse to pay different premiums even though both would get the same benefit. **Representative Furniss** said benefits are placed on a "plate" and it is up to the employee to take the benefits off the plate if they are not interested in them. He said Teacher A would pay \$59 a month and Teacher B would pay \$660 a month. **Senator Woodward** asked what the benefit package would then be for teacher B. **Representative Furniss** said both teachers would have the same benefit package. **Senator Woodward** asked if the school district would pay more for one teacher over the other. **Representative Furniss** said the State bills the same for all employees and that number is \$13,789 per year. Teacher B would therefore make a larger contribution to the premium than Teacher A.

Senator Ward-Engelking said a career ladder bill was passed last year and **H 248** seems problematic as it uses career ladder money for health care. **Representative Kerby** said the career ladder money is an allocation. Line 35 of **H 248** says an allocation can be used anyway the districts want. **Senator Ward-Engelking** pointed out that, according to **H 248** teachers not on minimum salaries would have to pay the insurance premium but new teachers on minimum salary would not. **Representative Kerby** said new teachers making \$40,000 a year cannot make less than that amount which is why they do not pay a premium in their first year, as an established teacher would have to pay. He said districts would therefore need to hold open discussions with all teachers to see if they wanted to opt in to the State health insurance plan.

Senator Johnson asked if the Idaho Department of Insurance reviewed **H 248**. **Representative Furniss** said the Department of Administration would be administering and charging the premiums for Idahoans who wished to participate, and **H 248** was originally written to help teachers in smaller districts get onto the State health insurance plan. He also said the Department of Insurance did not find anything objectionable in the bill.

TESTIMONY: **Stephen Thomas** on behalf of Idaho Association of Health Plans; **Norm Varin**, on behalf of the Institute for Achievement of Human Potential; **Fred Birnbaum**, Idaho Freedom Foundation; and **Benn Brocksom**, Idaho Association of Health Underwriters, testified in opposition to **H 248**. They said **H 248** offers big risks to the State and could cause higher than average insurance premiums for State employees.

Quinn Perry, on behalf of Idaho Association of School Administrators, testified in support of **H 248**. She said the district administrators believe teachers would get more take-home pay if **H 248** passes.

MOTION: **Senator Johnson** moved to hold **H 248** to the call of the Chair. **Senator Den Hartog** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Thayn** adjourned the meeting at 4:03 p.m.

Senator Thayn
Chair

Florence Lince
Secretary