

The following three letters pertain to HJR001, a House Joint Resolution, which is the first step to amending the Idaho Constitution to allow diversion of public school funds to private and religious institutions.

Names of recipients and senders have been removed. Please note that when writing letters to legislators, include the bill number in your subject line, and respectfully address your elected official. You must include your name and mailing address (or phone number) in your signature line, as well.

I am contacting you today to voice my deep objections to the bill recently introduced that will allow public funds to be allocated to religious schools. As an Idaho taxpayer I believe that using my tax dollars to support the religious education of anyone is a violation of my right to freely exercise my own religion. I do **not** want my tax dollars being used to subsidize parochial institutions in any way. While I am not a Constitutional scholar, I also believe it violates the clause regarding separation of church and state. I have concerns that this type of legislation could set our state up for a costly legal battle. It takes funds away from the important mission in our public schools of educating all to be logical, free thinkers. I believe that religion should be taught in the home and in the church/temple/synagogue as well as be modeled in daily life by parents and religious leaders. Public schools serve an important function in providing fact based, unbiased education to all. Public education has been the cornerstone of our nation's success and leadership in the world, and the sad erosion of this excellent institution is weakening our leadership in many areas. Keep our taxes in the public school system.

In a similar vein, the proposal to exclude subjects like evolution and climate change are ridiculous and will expose this great state to further erosion of our children's education and ridicule by others. Withholding this type of universally held information from our students is as ridiculous as Texas removing all references to slavery from their textbooks and sets our students up to perform poorly in institutions of higher education. States that enact these types of limitations on education further perpetuate the stereotypes of their residents as red-necked hicks who know nothing of the greater world around them. I do not want this for Idaho students. Do you?

I understand that the Idaho Legislature might consider a bill to amend the Idaho Constitution to allow for public funds to flow to religious schools. This idea is inconsistent with Idaho's values of (1) individual responsibility for one's decisions and choices; and (2) the separation of Church and State in public affairs.

Regarding (1): As a responsible 3rd generation Idaho taxpayer, I strongly object to my hard-earned money being used to financially support parents who choose to send their children to religious schools.

Regarding (2): The Idaho Constitution, SECTION 5. SECTARIAN APPROPRIATIONS PROHIBITED, states:

"Neither the legislature nor any county, city, town, township, school district, or other public corporation, shall ever make any appropriation, or pay from any public fund or moneys whatever, anything in aid of any church

or sectarian or religious society, or for any sectarian or religious purpose, or to help support or sustain any school, academy, seminary, college, university or other literary or scientific institution, controlled by any church, sectarian or religious denomination whatsoever; nor shall any grant or donation of land, money or other personal property ever be made by the state, or any such public corporation, to any church or for any sectarian or religious purpose; provided, however, that a health facilities authority, as specifically authorized and empowered by law, may finance or refinance any private, not for profit, health facilities owned or operated by any church or sectarian religious society, through loans, leases, or other transactions."

Section 5 must NOT be amended to allow the flow of public funds to religious schools. If I choose to send my children to a religious school, that is my responsibility, and NOT the responsibility of the State of Idaho.

I appreciate your thoughtful consideration of my objection to this proposed bill.

As a long-time member of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) Idaho, I strongly urge you to reject any move to alter the Idaho Constitution to allow for public school funds to be used for religious education. Such legislation would fly in the face of religious freedom and the separation of church and state, which are core American principles.

AAUW believes, as I do, that a strong public education system is the foundation of our democracy. The diversion of public school funds to private religious institutions would be a dangerous and divisive trend, setting the state up for endless litigation and strife.

If drafters of such legislation intend to include religious institutions in the state public education funding stream (when there is never enough to fund public education for all, as the Constitution mandates), then legislators must be prepared to fund all religious education beyond the fundamental Christian variety, be it Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, and any number of other mainstream Christian religious entities that would benefit by getting on the taxpayer-funded bandwagon.

I strongly oppose any proposal that would hint at the establishment of a preferred state religion in the Idaho Constitution. This is not the American way. Please remember your U.S. history, how the first European settlers came here to escape religious persecution, and reject this ridiculous notion.

In addition, I heartily oppose the dismantling of science standards in the education curriculum that is being discussed. Please don't allow those with certain personal beliefs to trump established scientific inquiry.

I look forward to hearing back from you on these matters.

This letter's subject is increasing the Minimum Wage

I am writing to urge you to support a hearing on HB400 in the House Ways and Means Committee.

Idaho workers earn some of the lowest wages nationwide, leaving many working families in poverty. Women, especially, are impacted by the trend towards part-time, low-paying jobs. This sets them up for a lifetime of poverty that impacts not only the quality of life of their families, but also that of our communities and state.

An honest day's work should not leave anyone in this country with so little money that they must rely on government and charitable services to make ends meet. Idaho can, and should, do better.

Please let the people speak - let Idahoans bring to light the devastating impacts of low wages and the positive changes that a living wage would bring to businesses and workers. Thank you for your work.

This last letter's subject is Medicaid expansion, Senate Bills 1204 and 1205

I greatly appreciate your giving the public a chance to weigh in on this critical issue.

Like all of you, I am one of the lucky ones. Thanks to my late husband, I have Federal employee health care for life.

If you have suspected cancer, your primary care physician orders an MRI or a CAT scan and sends you to an oncologist. If you break a bone, you are sent to an

orthopedic surgeon, and if you have serious depression, you are referred to a psychiatrist. You understand what I mean.

But the hard working ladies who clean my house every two weeks don't have that luxury now and would not have it under PCAP. Under Governor Otter's proposal, the 78,000 uninsured Idahoans would not be referred to a specialist, have advanced diagnostic tests or even expensive drugs. Because it is financially within easy reach, it seems highly unfair to deny our fellow citizens the services, which we take for granted. I haven't talked to one physician who feels that the PCAP is an adequate plan.

The Idaho Legislature prides itself on being fiscally conservative. If we were talking about a budget-breaking expense, you, of course, would reject it. However, the expansion of Medicare will save our state \$170 million. This is money we would otherwise be leaving on the table. Instead, you are considering spending \$30 million per year, funded by tobacco and cigarette taxes, a declining source of revenue. Think of the impact those funds could make on infrastructure, education or even tax cuts.

I urge you to think about your 78,000 underserved constituents and to take the humanitarian, fiscally-common-sense path of Medicare expansion. All of Idaho will be healthier!

I look forward to hearing from you on these matters.