



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on March 10, 2011

Idaho Legislators Follow Wisconsin Lawmakers' Footsteps

The GOP-backed measure in Idaho, Senate Bill 1108, would phase out tenure for new teachers and restrict collective bargaining on teachers' salaries and benefits. It was the first bill in a proposed three-bill package that has been entitled the "Students Come First" initiative. The second part of the initiative, SB 1110, to implement a pay-for-performance plan for educators, [passed](#) the House Wednesday, March 9. Both bills are now on their way to the desk of Idaho Governor C.L. "Butch" Otter for signature. Otter is an architect and co-sponsor of the initiative. The third part of the initiative, SB 1113, a sweeping classroom and curriculum reform plan, is currently stalled in the Senate.



[United Press International](#) reported concerning the newly-passed SB 1108:

The legislation lets districts fire teachers when school enrollment drops and limits negotiations to salaries and benefits. It also drops seniority as a factor in layoffs and phases out tenure for new teachers in favor of two-year rolling contracts.

It also eliminates the program that provides cash incentives for teachers who retire early. Furthermore, school districts that lose students will no longer be permitted to hold on to 99 percent of the state funding that came with the student.

SB 1108 passed in the Idaho House on a 48-22 vote, with just nine Republicans voting against their Party to oppose the bill. It had earlier passed the Senate on February 24 on a 20-14 vote. The vote on SB 1110 was similar to the earlier vote on SB1108, although the Republicans lost a few more votes on SB1110. All 44 votes in favor of SB 1110 came from Republicans; 13 Republicans joined all 13 Democrats in the House to oppose the bill.

Republican state Rep. Bob Nonini, chairman of the Education Committee, said of the legislation: "This bill is about returning the balance of authority to school boards and the public. For too long school boards have been shackled to agreements made 10, 20, even 30 years ago. We don't bind future legislators and we shouldn't bind school board members."

[Fox News](#) explains Nonini's stance:

Teacher tenure is a longstanding benefit for public school teachers and college professors dating back to the beginning of the 20th century. The campaign for tenure sprung out of other workers' rights movements and was tied to the push for broader women's rights-it was meant to keep experienced teachers safe from the whims of administrators and cultivate talented instructors.

But over the years, teachers' unions have pressed for expanded rights, and critics of tenure-which in some cases can be earned in just two years-say it's morphed into a tool to keep bad teachers



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from being fired.

Nonini adds, “Through this plan, we are going to attract and retain more quality teachers in Idaho by offering a two-year contract, increased pay and the opportunity to earn bonuses.”

Republican Representative Leon Smith is one of the few Republicans who voted against his Party. Smith explains, “This is a very mean-spirited bill. It goes beyond bashing the union. It bashes teachers and that, to me, is not a good direction to go. It turns teachers into powerless pawns.”

Democratic state Representative Brian Cronin responded to the bill’s passage, “Let’s stop pretending. The bill intends to dismantle the Idaho Education Association, put teachers in their place, and make sure that teachers are effectively silenced.” He adds, “One person’s medicine is another person’s Kool-Aid and I refuse to drink it.”

The measure is part of Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Luna’s plan to reform the K-12 education system in Idaho, though the largest provision of Luna’s plan — which boosts technology in the classroom, requires online courses, increases the minimum teacher pay, increases class sizes, and introduces pay-for-performance — is currently being held up in the Idaho Senate.

Luna, who helped to draft the passed legislation, asserts that it’s part of “an overall comprehensive reform process for education” in the state and “restores power to our local school boards.”

Comparing Idaho’s legislation to that of states such as Wisconsin, [Politico](#) writes: “In Wisconsin and in Indiana — where Republican Gov. Mitch Daniels and the Republican legislature agreed to reconsider their bill after Democrats fled to Illinois in protest — proposed legislation would affect most, if not all, public-sector unions, and not just those representing teachers.”

According to Idaho’s teachers union, the Idaho Education Association, the bill is a violation of teachers’ rights. Idaho Education Association president Sherri Wood has accused the Idaho legislators of ignoring the will of the people. “Idahoans have spoken out for two months against these bills, but lawmakers refuse to listen. I know teachers. I’ve been in this profession for 34 years, and I know that the voices of teachers will not be silenced.”

The union also called for protest rallies all across the state of Idaho, particularly at the Capitol in Boise. On Wednesday, March 9, several hundred teachers and supporters formed a ring around the Idaho Capitol to protest the legislation.

Photo: Idaho state capitol



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