

IDAHO STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
AND THE COUNCIL OF HIGHER EDUCATION PRESIDENTS
NEWS CONFERENCE ON SENATE BILL 1254
Boise, Idaho, 3 February 2014

Remarks by Don Burnett
Interim President, University of Idaho

I have the honor of serving as chair of the Higher Education Presidents Council. The presidents are gathered here to express their unanimous opposition to proposed legislation that would substantially reduce the current authority of Idaho's post-secondary institutions to regulate firearms on campus. I am authorized to say that the incoming president of the University of Idaho, Dr. Chuck Staben, who will take office on March 1, joins the other presidents in taking this position.

The governing boards of our post-secondary institutions, and the presidents of those institutions, are committed to providing a safe living, learning and teaching environment for our students, faculty, staff and visitors. They, along with their local and campus constituents, have the responsibility, as well as the institution-specific knowledge, to adopt and implement policies that promote safety in the academic environment.

Sound public policy should keep the exercise of governmental authority close to the people and institutions affected. The proposed legislation would cut back the authority of our postsecondary institutions to use their best judgment on how to promote safety in the academic environment and in local circumstances. The bill would impose a statewide preclusion against these judgments, and would impose a statewide command to allow the concealed-carry of loaded firearms in classrooms, laboratories, offices, and most student gathering places.

Sound public policy should be evidence-based. Currently, there is little rigorous empirical research on gun safety relating to college campuses, and what research does exist has not demonstrated that safety is enhanced by increasing the number of concealed-carry weapons on campus.

Sound public policy should not fix what is not broken. Idaho's post-secondary education institutions are among the safest in the nation.

Higher education campuses present complex and sensitive issues; they should not be lumped together with other public spaces in which concealed-carry of weapons is allowed. The United States Supreme Court, in upholding citizen rights under the Second Amendment, has noted that regulation is appropriate in places of special sensitivity such as schools and government facilities.

Many of our campuses contain day care facilities, and our campuses welcome many varieties of visitors, including K-12 students in campus programs that are conducted in venues where the proposed legislation would apply. Moreover, many law enforcement experts are concerned that a proliferation of firearms will make response by law enforcement authorities in crisis situations more complicated and more dangerous.

The post-secondary education presidents appreciate the good faith of legislators and others who have expressed support for the proposed bill, but we join with the State Board in respectfully and emphatically urging that the bill not be adopted. Meanwhile, we will continue working to maintain a positive and safe climate on Idaho's campuses.