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February 9, 2003

TO: Senator Rawson and Members of the Human Resources Committee

FROM: Ray Bacon

SUBJECT: Alternative Licensing for Teachers

NOTE 1 – SB 35 contains a significant drafting question on Page 2, Section 3 where we recommend some clarification. In testimony to the interim education committee we recommended a maximum intensive training period of 8 weeks or 2 months initially and recommend that be included in section 3, 1.(a). In Section 3.1.(b) the additional two week after a year of teaching was not in our recommendations, but seems like a good idea.

NOTE 2 – In discussions with Laurie Rich from the US Dept of Education, they strongly suggest that alternative licensing candidates must be in the field of their "college major" and that somehow we should reflect that change with modification to page 6, Section 7.1.(b). This change for alternative licensing people would be consistent with the provisions of NCLB and without this change we are in conflict with the federal law. As you will see our current law would allow "the holder to teach in his major or minor field or preparation or in both fields in any secondary school." This change could be clarified in either Section 7.1. or with changes to the new Section 7.2. to make the rule different for those getting a license through the alternative route.

Nevada has a constant battle to find enough teachers to fill our classrooms each fall. Part of our problem is the lack of quality output from our own institutions. Part of our problem is a reasonably high turnover rate as teachers leave to go to other places or professions. We have expanded our teacher output with Henderson College, a four years program at Great Basin College and discussion of 2+2 programs at the other community colleges. However, our total output is about half of our need and a large portion of our output never goes in the teaching field.

We import teachers in the average years from about 30+ states and a hundred plus institutions. If all colleges of education provide an equal quality consistent product, then we might have few problems in our schools. However that will never be the case and we are the only western state other than Alaska that does not have a viable program to draw on perhaps the best resource – current Nevadans that would like to try teaching as a change of career or second career.

The recent edition Education Week's Quality Counts 2003 has a special section on alternative licensing approaches to the teacher shortage challenge. Education Week shows Nevada has no program, which is not correct. Our program takes teachers aids and other school staff through the standard course work to a full license in three years. We have about 200 through the program since inception in 1997 while we hire about 2000 annually. While that program should continue, it is not even a 2% solution to our teacher shortage. We don't consider that as a viable program when our problem is in the 50% range each year.

Will a viable alternative licensing program that takes 4-year degree holders and puts them into the classroom in a couple months solve our teacher shortage problem? The answer is "NO", but it might help and the cost is nominal to get it going. Nevada has many retirees from the military and other fields that have a wealth of experience, subject matter expertise and maturity. When told it will take them 2 to 4 years to become a teacher in Nevada, they forget the whole idea. With our constant shortage condition, Nevada cannot afford to loose those potential resources. The Education Week article points out that the turnover rate is about the same as traditional college of education graduates and the teacher effectiveness is about the same with less variation. Perhaps the best part of alternative licensing program is that they tend to bring in more men, minorities and people willing to tackle the challenges of inner city and high minority schools. Those schools, as you know, are our greatest challenges.

We have provide a host of resources attached:

A segment from the Quality Counts 2003 by Education Week including the section on alternative licensing programs.

*The Abel Foundation Report that examined every study on teacher accreditation in the last 50 years. They found most that strongly support the exclusive nature of colleges of education as the source for teacher are technically flawed. The key elements for good teacher are subject matter expertise and good communications skills.

The USDOEd Press release from last June where alternative licensing is specifically mentioned as needed to achieve high teacher quality for every classroom.

Information on the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence and the related Passport Certification for New Teachers. While this may not provide an immediate solution, it is clear that the USDOEd consider it a critical part of the teacher shortage solution.

A sampling of data from the Teach For America program that make be one sources of new teachers for new.

*The US Dept of Education report "Meeting the Highly Qualified Teachers Challenge" from June 2002.

* These two report are very long and we know that you will not have time to read through them in detail, but a copy of each will be made available if you want them. Pepper has copies of both reports.

Finally, I want to close with some very direct and specific observations. None of you would be qualified to teach in the K-12 classroom today.

Senator Mathews has a Masters in Education Administration, but has been out of the field long enough that she would probably have to go back to classes for a year before going into a classroom. I can think of no person that would be better and more demanding in the classroom of a school named for her than Senator Mathews would. I can see her making it clear that as long as her name is on the front of the building that "her" expectations will be met. We know that "High Expectation" for ALL students is part of NCLB.

Senator Rawson teaches at the college level, but cannot get a license to teach high school science, where I believe he would be a gifted teacher.

Senator Neal cannot teach a government or history class in our K-12 schools without years of classroom study. Certainly he is an expert in these areas, as many of you will confirm as you have sat through his lectures on numerous occasions.

Senator Washington has been closer to the K-12 field in recent years than other members, but even he cannot teach in our K-12 schools.

Senator Weiner could be a dynamic high school English teacher with her background as a speaker, author and advocate, but she would need a couple years of college to become a licensed teacher in our K-12 schools.

Senator Nolan in his paramedic role has many hours of teaching people CPR and other skills related to saving lives, but he cannot teach in our K-12 schools.

Finally Senator Cegavske got into the world of politics because of her involvement in education issues. She has years of street smarts in the field of education and small business, but it would take her years in the college of education to become a licensed teacher in Nevada.

Perhaps none of you would ever consider taking on the demanding job of being a teacher, but should you be barred from making a huge contribution to the next generation by a set of rules that don't work and perhaps never did? We can assume that you would NOT decide not to become a teacher because of the pay – you are legislators.

We fully support subject matter testing for people taking the expedited alternative path to become a licensed teacher. We believe that they need a mentor teacher for at least the first year. If we select Nevada residents, as we should, then a hiring bonus is probably inappropriate for people entering through an alternative program. If our community colleges are unable or unwilling to create the expedited short course required prior to entering the classroom, the Sierra Nevada College, Henderson State College, the University of Phoenix as well as Teach For America should be contacted.

If you see improvements that are needed to the bill, we will likely support sensible changes, but we need a viable program that allows us to use our residents that want to be teachers in a logical, but prompt alternative licensing process. The exclusive college of education route to become a licensed teacher no longer makes sense.