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## **UI president: Stick with WWAMI for med school**

*Gov. Otter says program doesn't keep enough doctors in Idaho*

MOSCOW - The president of the University of Idaho said training doctors out of state is still Idaho's best option for medical education, despite the governor's statement Monday he was "disappointed" with the program.

Steven Daley-Laursen, the UI's interim president, said other options weighed by an interim legislative committee could sacrifice the quality and efficiency of the Wyoming, Washington, Alaska, Montana and Idaho program that sends medical students to the University of Washington.

"We should not set ourselves up with a vision bigger than what Idaho can accomplish with some empire within the state that throws away leverage externally, and causes a drop in our quality," Daley-Laursen said. "I have no tolerance for that."

In a statement issued through his spokesman, Idaho Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter said he was only disappointed with WWAMI's record of keeping the doctors it trains in Idaho.

"We haven't managed that program to retain those doctors," Otter said in a recorded statement meant to clarify comments he made to the committee Monday. "Not that it hasn't worked. It's worked and it's worked well for the students that participated in it that become good doctors. "Unfortunately, a disproportionate share is not staying in Idaho."

He said expanding WWAMI, as the UI has long proposed, is still a viable option. Daley-Laursen said WWAMI has one of the highest home placement rates of any medical education program in the country. And it does it as cheaply as possible by expanding an established program, not investing heavily in a completely new model, he added. "We have a quality program in place," he said. "It does what people want. It gets extremely high retention of doctors we educate."

Andrew Turner, the WWAMI director at the UI, said the program has a 50 percent retention rate, compared to a 39 percent national average. He said university officials would work to make Otter and the committee aware of that statistic over the next couple of months.

"I think he would actually like to see 100 percent," Turner said of Otter's hopes for the program.

But that would be unrealistic, he said. As evidence, he cited Wyoming's participation in WWAMI. That state pays for all of its students' tuition and fees at UW in exchange for signing a three-year contract to practice medicine in Wyoming, he said. "And their return rate is only 80 percent," Turner said.

Idaho students pay for their own participation in the program. Daley-Laursen said he feared what would happen to other priorities if the state decides to opt for something it can't afford, like a medical school.

"We need to not gut all funding for higher education and push it in one direction," he said. "We have multiple needs for the funding of higher education, and this is just one."

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He and Turner attended the committee meeting Monday in Boise where Otter initially made his comments about WWAMI.

At the meeting, Idaho State University President Arthur Vailas promoted his proposal to establish an in-state medical school as early as 2011.

Idaho is facing a shortage of medical professionals, especially in rural areas, as doctors retire or move elsewhere. Otter spokesman Jon Hanian said Idaho ranks 49th in the nation in doctors per capita, according to the American Medical Association, and 40 percent of its doctors are 55 or older.

Hanian said Otter considers all options still on the table, including the UI's proposed initial expansion of WWAMI to 40 seats, up from 20 currently.