

Gov. Otter shakes up earthquake lesson in Jerome

By John Plestina - Times-News writer | Posted: Thursday, October 22, 2009 1:00 am

JEROME - Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter created seismic disturbances by stomping his feet and jumping last Thursday as he participated in a science lesson delivered from Jerome High School to students in Shoshone and Weiser over the new Idaho Education Network.

As Otter created mini-disturbances, JHS science teacher Steve Bruns presented the lesson to students at the remote sites and showed off the new seismograph JHS acquired Sept. 29.

The National Science Foundation sponsored IRIS's Seismographs in Schools Program and provided the seismograph and training for Bruns in San Antonio, Texas, through a grant.

Seismographs detect and record earthquakes and other ground motion, such as the governor stomping his feet.

Bruns asked his oldest student to help him demonstrate how movement influences the seismograph. "Governor, would you mind stomping your feet?"

Otter stomped his right foot a few times. "It would be easier if the Legislature was in here," he said.

"So," Bruns asked, "how many teachers would ask the governor to jump?"

Otter jumped. "How many governors would?" Otter asked.

Then Bruns showed Otter's movements on a seismic graph displayed on a screen that was divided into four quadrants, one for Shoshone, one for Weiser and two for the Jerome classroom.

Bruns showed the seismic reading from the recent earthquake in Samoa and another in Indonesia.

"This is real data reported here in Jerome, Idaho," he said.

Then Bruns posed questions to students in Shoshone and Weiser via the IEN and they responded through the high-speed broadband network that makes high school and college courses available to small schools that otherwise could not offer the classes.

The inclusion of every high school and public college in Idaho is expected within three years through a phased implementation.

Otter was apparently impressed with both the seismograph and the IEN demonstration.

"We'll have every high school in the state hooked up to it in two years," he said.

"Obviously this is a wonderful demonstration of this. Everybody is going to have an equal opportunity to participate and get an equal education," he said of IEN leveling the playing field for rural students. "We haven't even tapped into all the possibilities yet."

He added that with a shortage of science and math teachers in many Idaho school districts, students attending small schools in all parts of Idaho could participate in science classes from Jerome High School.

"In the Jerome School District we have had a history of at least 10 years of technology," said Jerome Director of Technology Chris Gibson.

"I'm not just saying this because you're sitting here, Governor. This feels different. This feels right. I feel this is going to work," Gibson said.

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