

# Next, the Great Nonini will manage wolves

Jim Fisher

Thursday, April 2, 2009

Idaho is said to have a part-time Legislature, but you'd never know it from the services performed by state Rep. Bob Nonini.

Republican Nonini, a Coeur d'Alene financial consultant and insurance agent, is not only an expert on school administration, which he demonstrates from his post as chairman of the House Education Committee, but he has now assumed the roles of Transportation Department performance auditor and state highway inspector.

Yes, the Great Nonini helped lead his fellow House members to reject several attempts to raise the state gas tax Tuesday, telling them the department to which the money would go is "dysfunctional," and besides, Idaho's roads don't need it.

Sure, Gov. Butch Otter and the Idaho Transportation Board say the state has a \$240 million backlog in road and bridge maintenance, and that work not done now will require taxpayers to spend more later. But Nonini knows better.

How? He's driven on some Idaho roads. Why, only last weekend, he drove U.S. Highway 95 from Boise to Coeur d'Alene, and he could tell from his car that it's in fine shape.

"I just did not see a lot of potholes, pavement crumbling away, and I specifically looked," Nonini said. "Traffic flowed nice. Frost heaves, chuck holes, crumbling shoulders - I didn't see any of that."

And what of Otter's recent executive order imposing performance standards on the Transportation Department, which would not receive gas tax dollars unless it meets them? Just a "sales technique," according to Nonini, and "not worth the piece of paper it was printed on."

"I'm tired of throwing good money after bad," Nonini said. "The ITD needs to get its house in order."

Has the ITD made its share of mistakes? You bet. Only recently, for example, it overestimated the amount of cash that Otter's proposed increase in vehicle registration fees would raise by \$11 million. But according to a \$500,000 study by the state's Office of Performance Evaluation - no doubt a redundancy with Nonini

on the job - it should be spending more on new management systems and, believe it or not, highway maintenance.

Otter, Nonini's fellow Republican and no friend to big taxes or big spending, believes it. That is why he has been pursuing more money for road work the last legislative session and this one.

For what it's worth, legislative and state government veterans like Bruce Sweeney of Lewiston and Darrell Manning of Boise, who serve on the Transportation Board, believe it too. Both were in Lewiston between legislative sessions stumping for the increased funding Otter has sought.

But what do they know? Have they ever looked out Nonini's windshield? - J.F.