

Op-Ed comment by D.F. Oliveria for the Handle Extra 2/14/10

Benewah County Sheriff **Robert Kirts** isn't going to win his battle to continue to treat Coeur d'Alene tribal police with contempt.

He's already losing that war.

Last week, the House Judiciary Committee voted unanimously in favor of a bill that would end his authority to cooperate with tribal police on law enforcement, if he can't act like a grown-up in dealing with tribal police.

Importantly, the dislike, distrust and possible bias **Kirts** and other elected officials have toward the tribe is now on full display for all Idahoans and Inland Northwesterners to see.

Kirts hasn't helped his cause by referring to respected human rights official Christie Wood as "stupid" and by labeling concerns from the Kootenai County Task Force on Human Relations as a bunch of "fecal matter." That might play well in St. Maries coffee shops. But **Kirts'** crude comments and dug-in attitude are fueling human rights reform – and giving Benewah County a bad name.

Also, he didn't help his image Tuesday by reading a prepared statement and then walking off without answering questions during an interview with a KREM2 reporter. That scene was caught on camera, revealing a man in authority who doesn't react well when trying to explain his wrongheaded methods to the public beyond county boundaries.

On **Kirts'** watch, Benewah County has become like Bonner County at the cusp of the new millennium. That was when uberconservatives Bud Mueller and the late Larry Allen grabbed power at the Bonner County courthouse and, as commissioners, began to shake things up in a Neanderthal way, only to land their county on the Southern Poverty Law Center watch list and become a target for human right efforts.

Ultimately, Allen abandoned Mueller and their movement lost control of the courthouse when Bonner County residents got fed up with far-right antics and the stigma attached to them.

This showdown over cross-deputization may be the beginning of the end for bigotry in Benewah County.

Kirts may discover he's become the poster guy for small-mindedness in Benewah County.