

# From Mount Heyburn, Idaho's lawgivers impose their will

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**By Marty Trillhaase of the Tribune**

You could call the just-concluded Idaho legislative session the worst in 121 years of statehood.

And you'd be wrong.

Worst doesn't begin to describe it.

The men and women who sat out the winter under the Capitol dome have delivered a government that is radically different:

- Lawmakers become lawgivers - Time was, if lawmakers wanted to pass a sales tax or shift schools from local to state support, they asked you. They coaxed you. They won your support. And they took their time.

Today's lawgivers descend from Mount Heyburn and inform the rest of us how life is going to be.

Didn't like state Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Luna's bills to emasculate the teachers' union, impose merit pay, create a market for his cronies who sell laptop computers and online instruction, and pay for it all by eliminating your child's teacher?

Tough.

Luna got elected. That's all anyone needs in this new paradigm - a mandate.

- Revolting developments - On the Civil War's 150th anniversary, Idaho lawmakers asserted the discredited tirade of the Confederacy by trying to nullify the national health care package. In the closing hours, they encourage communities to kill wolves in defiance of federal law.

Impose concealed weapons on Idaho's peaceful college campuses? Go for it.

Kick independent voters out of the one election that counts - the GOP primary - and bill taxpayers \$100,000 for the privilege? Why not?

Stop pesky citizens from holding their government accountable in court? Grand idea.

Interfere with the most personal of decisions - from end-of-life care to midterm pregnancies that have gone catastrophically wrong? You betcha.

•Idaho's forgotten - Idaho has 74,000 unemployed people. Another 7,000 are so discouraged that they've stopped looking. And 50,000 more are occupied at part-time jobs because they can't find full-time work.

Their legislators tried to cut off long-term unemployment benefits for nearly 18,000 people.

Nobody can live on what the federal government defines as poverty - \$22,050 for a family of four - but 216,000 Idahoans - including 75,000 children - must try. No state has seen a swifter rise in its food stamp case load. Three years ago, 87,104 needed help getting food on the table. Today, that number is 229,218. It's so many that grocery store chains say they can't handle all the people coming in to replenish their stocks on the first of the month.

Legislators picked this time to suspend a modest increase in the grocery sales credit to scrounge up \$15 million - and then gave half of it away as a tax credit to businesses.

So many people have lost their jobs and their health care coverage that the ranks of Medicaid clients swelled by almost a fifth, to 225,675. The Legislature cut \$35 million in state support, forfeited another \$75 million in federal matching funds and threw some of Idaho's most defenseless citizens to their own devices.

•The boss is in - Rep. Phil Hart, R-Athol, could steal from the public's trust in government - and anything else he could get his hands on whether it's public timber or unpaid taxes. Two ethics complaints later, House Speaker Lawrence Denney, R-Midvale, waited to slap one of his loyalist's wrists until he had Hart's permission.

But Agricultural Affairs Committee Chairman Tom Trail, R-Moscow, and Transportation Committee Chairman Leon Smith, R-Twin Falls, bucked the conservative line and got dumped at the last minute Friday.

Tax committee chairman Dennis Lake, R-Blackfoot, printed a modest bill to explore how Idaho might collect sales tax owed on Internet sales. Denney yanked the pages from Lake's fingers and buried it in his desk.

Budget-writer Maxine Bell, R-Jerome, got a trip to the woodshed for having the temerity to suggest spending money held in reserves rather than cutting programs.

These changes aren't merely drastic. They will be long-lived. Get used to it. - M.T.