

No profile in courage

Marty Trillhaase

JEERS ... to Washington's 9th Legislative District delegation - Sen. Mark Schoesler, R-Ritzville, and Reps. Susan Fagan, R-Pullman, and Joe Schmick, R-Colfax. All three voted against Washington's same-sex marriage bill, which Gov. Chris Gregoire signed into law Monday.

For Schoesler, Fagan and Schmick, it was the safe vote. For instance, the 9th District rejected Washington's "everything but marriage" law 2-to-1 in 2009.

"I was interested in knowing the views of the district, but on this one, I followed my own views," Schmick said. "It was nice to be backed up by the people, but even if it would have gone the other way, I would have voted this way."

It's no profile in courage to kneecap a minority while the crowd cheers on.

Sen. Richard Russell, D-Ga., followed his constituents by filibustering civil rights legislation a half-century ago. Today's more inclusive society looks back on Russell less kindly than it does upon his one-time protege, Lyndon Johnson, who as president pursued civil rights measures in spite of the political risk to himself.

With gay rights, the tide also is turning.

Washington is the seventh - not the first or even the fifth - state to recognize marriage among same-sex partners. Courtesy of California's Proposition 8 battle, the question is headed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Opponents intend to put the new law to a referendum vote, but last October, 47 percent told a University of Washington poll they "strongly" support same-sex marriage while another 8 percent support it somewhat. Only 31 percent said they were "strongly" opposed to same-sex marriage while another 7 percent opposed it somewhat.

In Washington, people under 30 accept same-sex marriage 2-to-1.

Whatever popularity Schoesler, Fagan and Schmick enjoy for their votes today will be fleeting tomorrow.

CHEERS ... to Idaho state Sen. Dean Cameron, R-Rupert. The veteran co-chairman of the Legislature's budget-writing committee has just engineered a major correction in the LunaTech fiasco his party launched a year ago.

Under state schools chief Tom Luna's leadership, Republicans last year agreed to start pulling money from teacher payrolls into his online instruction and teacher merit pay

initiatives. Already, the measure siphoned 1.67 percent of teacher payrolls this year, or \$14.8 million. Next year, it would drain \$19 million unless lawmakers follow Luna's request and "back-fill" the money on a one-time basis.

By 2015 - after Luna's current term ends - the hit rises to 6.5 percent or \$57 million a year.

Which leaves three choices: Hire fewer teachers, pay them less or raise taxes.

Cameron opposed Luna's scheme for this very reason. Now he's launched a bill to reverse the game. If passed, lawmakers would leave the teacher payroll account alone. Each year, Luna or his successors would make the case for funding his initiatives. If the budget falls short, then lawmakers would cut spending on the Luna measures, reduce other programs or raise taxes. But the Luna plan would no longer be first in line.

Among his 18 co-sponsors - a majority of the Senate - are people who voted for the Luna plan in the first place, including Senate President Brent Hill, R-Rexburg, and Senate Education Committee Chairman John Goedde, R-Coeur d'Alene.

JEERS ... to Idaho Democratic Party Chairman Larry Grant. Twice now, his organization has fallen into the Emily Litella trap - so misstating the case against otherwise outrageous Republican behavior that one is forced to say, in the words of Gilda Radner's "Saturday Night Live" character, "Oh, never mind."

First it was the case of state Treasurer Ron Crane. A legislative audit showed Crane had lavishly spent state money for his daily commute to work as well as on a series of trips to New York City to secure Idaho's bond rating on tax anticipation notes - and then failing to account for his expenses.

In a Feb. 2 release, the Democratic Party wrote: "The audit noted that Crane has not used the state reporting system to track expenses for annual rafting trips."

Next came the correction: "A previous version of this press release was in error due to a reader's mistake. Crane failed to account for bond rating trips."

That's rating trips, not rafting trips, Emily.

In a column Wednesday, Grant noted former Congressman Bill Sali had asked lawmakers to create a new specialty license plate with the motto "In God We Trust" and direct \$22 of every \$35 plate fee and \$12 from each renewal toward the nonprofit group, American Heritage Foundation, he'd formed just two weeks earlier.

Sali, his wife, Terry, and nephew, Travis Pascoe of Nampa, are the nonprofit's only board members.

But Grant said Sali, his wife and nephew were "paid employees" of the nonprofit.

Then came the correction: The three are not paid employees, only directors. "We have yet to verify monetary compensation for personal benefits but as board members of the nonprofit [they] are expected to receive reasonable compensation for services rendered."

Grant and Idaho Democrats have every reason to draw public attention to the sheer audacity of the state's majority party. But there's a world of difference between wasting money on a bond rating trip and a whitewater rafting trip, between serving on a nonprofit board and drawing a paycheck.

When the more outrageous claim is debunked, one's reaction to the offenses still standing tends to be: "Oh, never mind."

CHEERS ... to State Sen. Dan Johnson, R-Lewiston. This week, Johnson and Patrick Malloy, a substitute for Sen. Shirley McKague, R-Meridian, were the only Senate Republicans to stand up for the Occupy Boise movement. They joined seven Democrats in opposing a GOP measure that would allow the state to evict the Capitol Mall protesters on an emergency basis.

So far, only five of Idaho's 85 Republican lawmakers have broken ranks. The others are Reps. Tom Trail of Moscow, Phil Hart of Athol and Janice McGeachin of Idaho Falls. - M.T.