

# Weaponized

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

JEERS ... to Rep. Shannon McMillan, R-Wallace. Wednesday, the House State Affairs Committee weaponized religion. McMillan joined 10 Republicans who forwarded onto the House floor a bill aimed at permitting discrimination against gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people. Even though state law already allows such behavior, seven Idaho cities - including Coeur d'Alene, Moscow, Boise and Idaho Falls - have passed their own anti-discrimination ordinances.

Rep. Lynn Luker, R-Boise, is doing the bidding of the Cornerstone Family Council by sponsoring a measure that would circumvent those ordinances on the basis of a sincerely held religious belief.

McMillan and her fellow Republicans had all the reasons in the world to stop it.

For one, Idaho Attorney General Lawrence Wasden's shop says the bill faces constitutional problems.

For another, the people in the actual business of saving souls opposed it. More than a dozen members of the clergy urged McMillan to leave religion alone.

"Please do not allow religious freedom to become religious abuse," said Judy Cross, who is a deacon at Treasure Valley Metropolitan Community Church.

Finally, more than two dozen people argued sincerely held religious beliefs could justify discrimination against anyone, hardly the kind of thing a state with a troubled reputation as a haven for bigotry wants on its law books.

The only people pushing the bill were Luker and two members of the conservative Cornerstone Family Council.

Talk about closing your eyes, your ears, your mind and your heart.

CChEERS ... to state Sen. Mark Schoesler, R-Ritzville. Until about 10 days ago, extending college financial aid to Washington's undocumented children was going nowhere. The Democratic-controlled House had passed the DREAM Act, but most of the GOP-dominated Senate majority caucus opposed it. Unless 14 of its 26 members agree, nothing reaches the floor.

Then last week, Schoesler and his Republican colleagues waived that rule. With support from 23 Democratic senators, the revamped "Real Hope Act" cleared the Senate 35-10. A dozen Republicans voted for it and four more were absent.

The Senate did the House one better by adding \$5 million for the program - enough to extend aid to 800 to 1,200 students.

What had been a battle of partisan finger-pointing and recriminations was resolved in favor of simple human decency.

For that, Schoesler deserves enormous credit.

JEERS ... to Idaho Correction Director Brent Reinke. A year ago, The Associated Press revealed that Corrections Corporation of American had billed the state for shifts not worked at the Idaho Correctional Center. It was a revelation that ultimately led to a federal contempt of court citation against CCA and Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter's reluctant decision to transform ICC into a publicly operated prison.

Throughout that year, people have been anticipating an Idaho State Police investigation that Reinke had promised his own Board of Correction. But when the AP's Rebecca Boone submitted a public records request for that investigation, she got a much different story.

Wednesday, ISP Capt. William Gardiner told her: "No detective was assigned. There was no investigation."

As Boone discovered, the matter was turned over to the forensic auditing firm KPMG, which found more than 26,000 hours of inadequately staffed shifts at the prison in 2012.

Reinke's department took this step because it "realized we needed more specialized skills. That's why we issued the RFP and eventually contracted with KPMG to conduct the investigation," a spokesman said.

But this disclosure comes on the heels of Idaho closing the books with CCA, accepting a \$1 million payout to settle the understaffing issues. Without the promised ISP investigation, how are we supposed to know whether CCA fully compensated or fleeced Idaho taxpayers?

Ultimately, however, the people of Idaho operated under a misimpression of Reinke's making - and he kept his decision to himself.

CHEERS .... to U.S. Sens. Mike Crapo and Jim Risch, both R-Idaho. Following the pattern set last week by Congressmen Mike Simpson and Raul Labrador, R-Idaho, Crapo and Risch voted for the new farm bill.

That puts two senators clearly on the side of their constituents. Among other things, the measure includes \$26 million in payment in lieu of taxes for Idaho counties, including \$1.5 million for Idaho County and \$628,000 for Clearwater County.

It also scales back the Environmental Protection Agency's attempt to restrict logging road activity.

And for Idaho's agriculture sector, the five-year bill restores certainty.

This is a switch for both Idaho senators. Along with a string of mainstream bills, they had opposed an earlier version of the bill.

The Club for Growth and the Heritage Foundation wanted the latest bill defeated, as well. Falling in line with that directive were Ted Cruz, R-Texas, Mike Lee, R-Utah, Rand Paul, R-Ky., Mark Rubio, R-Fla., and Pat Toomey, R-Penn.

JEERS ... to Sen. Risch. First, Congressional Quarterly Magazine ranked him President Obama's No. 1 adversary in the Senate. Risch has voted against the president 73.3 percent of the time - far and away more than anyone else. Crapo, ranked third, voted 70.9 percent of the time against Obama's agenda.

Then the National Journal once again named Risch the most conservative member of the Senate. He earned the same rating last year. Crapo came in 10th.

There was a time when getting labeled as an extremist would be an embarrassment.

Risch trumpeted both.

Gaining a reputation for radicalism and obstructionism may be good politics for a senator up for re-election in an overwhelmingly conservative state.

But Risch has spent decades in Idaho politics - as a state senator, governor and now U.S. senator. He knows how much Idaho depends on the federal government for its economic survival. When the Gem State needs help from the Obama administration - or even a fair break - Risch has nothing to offer.- M.T.