

Playing safe

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to Idaho Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter. When he signed into law a bill permitting college students to carry concealed guns to class, here's what he said:

"As elected officials, we have a sworn duty to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States - not only when doing so is easy, convenient or without cost, but especially when it is not."

And here's what he didn't say:

That's a strawman, folks. Even U.S. Supreme Court justices as pro-gun as Antonin Scalia will tell you the Second Amendment is not absolute and concealed weapons can be banned from government buildings and schools.

Yes, I heard the testimony of State Board of Education members, all eight public college presidents, students, parents and professional law enforcement officers urging me to veto this bill.

Yes, I know that if you took a poll, you'd probably find most college students, their parents and faculty members oppose to this.

Yes, I went to college myself and I know that for many, it's a time of social, sexual and psychological confusion mixed in with alcohol and drug experimentation. Adding weapons only makes this a more combustible mix.

Agreed, this may lead to more violence, not less.

And I will concede I could have called for a time-out and a study, bringing everyone to the table in the search for some agreement.

But I'm running for a third term. The twin threats of a veto override and a fight with the National Rifle Association would give my opponent, Sen. Russ Fulcher, R-Meridian, a real chance heading into the closed Republican primary.

I'd still probably win the primary, but why risk my neck - when I can risk yours?

JEERS ... to state Rep. Cindy Agidius, R-Moscow. Every one of Idaho's 105 lawmakers stood up and voted on the most contentious issue of the legislative session - whether to allow college students to roam campus with a concealed firearm.

All except Agidius, that is.

When the bill came up for a vote in the House last week, she was away attending a funeral.

That's no excuse. Lawmakers have the ability to pair up with someone who is committed to the other side if casting a recorded vote while absent matters to them.

So how would Agidius have voted?

"I really hadn't decided," she told the Tribune's William L. Spence. "I spent a lot of time talking to people about my concerns. On any given day, I could have made an argument on either side. I can't say - it would have been a tough decision."

She's right. It would have been a tough decision.

Agidius had to choose between the NRA - which could hurt her in the May 20 Republican primary - and the University of Idaho community - which could bounce her in favor of a Democrat in the Nov. 4 election.

So here's the bet: If no Republican files against her when the deadline lapses at 5:01 p.m. Mountain Time today, Agidius will rediscover her spine and come out foresquare against carrying concealed weapons on campus.

Any takers?

JEERS ... to Washington lawmakers. For weeks now, House Democrats and Senate Republicans have been fighting about a bill extending in-state tuition to any military veteran who chooses to attend one of Washington's state colleges and universities.

Everybody supports the vets.

They're fighting about who should get credit. House Democrats think their bill should pass; Senate Republicans want their own version enacted into law.

Among the key players in this standoff is Senate Republican Leader Mark Schoesler, R-Ritzville.

Aren't these people paid \$42,106 a year to be the grown-ups in the room?

JEERS ... to Sen. Russ Fulcher, R-Meridian. If one thing emerged from the Mark Patterson mess, it was this: Politicians should live under the same laws as everyone else. Patterson was the Boise lawmaker whose application for a concealed weapons permit turned up a withheld judgment in a 1974 Florida rape case and an acquittal at trial in a 1977 Ohio rape case.

Ada County Sheriff Gary Raney revoked Patterson's permit because he had concealed his criminal history. But a 1909 Idaho law allowed Patterson - and about 3,000 elected Idaho officials - to carry a concealed weapon without any background checks or training.

With the support of the NRA, the Idaho Sheriff's Association and House Speaker Scott Bedke, R-Oakley, a bill repealing that law sailed through the House - 62-7. (Among those voting no were state Reps. Shannon McMillan, R-Silverton, Shirley Ringo, D-Moscow, Paul Shepherd, R-Riggins, and Thyra Stevenson, R-Lewiston.)

But when the measure reached the Senate State Affairs Committee, Fulcher led the charge against it - and succeeded in stopping it.

"My vote will not be to willingly give up the privilege that our predecessors granted," Fulcher said. "We do not need to relinquish our privileges."

Privilege?

Is this the same Fulcher who is running for governor as the champion of the people against an entrenched and entitled political elite?

CHEERS to U.S. Attorney Wendy Olson and FBI Supervisory Senior Resident Agent Ernst Weyand, both of Boise.

Credit them for bringing the FBI into the investigation of how Corrections Corporation of America falsified time cards to conceal how it understaffed the Idaho Correctional Center taxpayers paid it \$29 million a year to manage.

Understaffing fueled enough inmate violence to earn ICC the moniker "the gladiator school."

Federal intervention adds a level of credibility no Idaho State Police investigation could deliver.

Not after ISP Col. Ralph Powell stunned the state last month by acknowledging the criminal probe supposedly underway for a year never occurred.

And not after Gov. Otter refused to launch a new review - until political pressure forced his hand. - M.T.