

Running late

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to Clarkston City Councilor Brian Kolstad. Sure, Kolstad says he will recuse himself from voting on marijuana issues.

"It's the right thing to do to avoid any appearance of impropriety," he said.

Public trust is such a fragile thing that anyone in public life has to guard against the appearance - not merely the fact - of divided loyalties.

So why did Kolstad have to be dragged into acknowledging a blatant conflict of interest: He's a business associate of a potential pot salesman.

Matt Plemmons of Seattle has applied for a license to sell recreational pot in Clarkston.

Kolstad and Plemmons are planning to run a distillery together.

The address Plemmons listed with the state licensing agencies was Kolstad's home.

But here was Kolstad on April 28. With fellow Councilor Larry Baumgartner, he voted against a six-month extension in the moratorium against implementing Washington Initiative 502's production, processing and sale of marijuana.

No mention of Plemmons then.

No talk of abstaining.

Here he was again Monday at the Clarkston Planning Commission meeting. The panel backed extending the moratorium.

Kolstad accused Public Works Director Jim Martin of discouraging marijuana businesses and ignoring the majority of Clarkston voters who had supported I-502.

By then, the Tribune's Kerri Sandaine had uncovered Kolstad's ties to Plemmons. Only after she pressed the councilor to explain did Kolstad inquire with the city about whether he had a conflict of interest.

As epiphanies go, that's a bit late.

JEERS ... to David Estes. The chairman of Taxpayers Against Unfair Taxation went on a homophobic tirade at the Lewiston City Council's work session Monday.

Up for review was Councilor Jesse Maldonado's proposal to make Lewiston the eighth Idaho community to ban discrimination on the job, in housing and in public accommodations on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Estes' record of opposing gay rights extends at least back to 1978 when he tried to repeal Seattle's ordinance forbidding discriminating against gays.

"There's 34 million people dead worldwide because of this behavior," Estes said. That's a reference to HIV/AIDS. "We've spent millions of money trying to provide hospice care for these people. We spend millions trying to cure this disease, and trying to treat the people that have it. It looks to me almost like as if you're trying to vote for your own self-destruction."

Gosh, Dave, where have you been these past 30 years?

Did you miss the fact that AIDS is not some kind of "gay plague" but a virus that's transmitted through the exchange of bodily fluids?

Have you not kept up with the fact that the bulk of people infected with HIV are heterosexuals living in Africa - where, in some countries, homosexuality is a crime?

Are you truly ignorant of the medical advances made in the past three decades - from screening the blood supply to developing effective antiretroviral drugs that have transformed HIV into a chronic rather than fatal condition?

How does a medical condition merit discriminating against people?

Who's next? Disabled senior citizens?

JEERS ... to Lewiston City Councilor Clinton Daniel and Mayor Pro Tem Ryan (RJ) Johnson. Rather than passing Maldonado's ordinance, they have a better idea:

Let's just tell everybody to play nice.

Pass a proclamation urging people to refrain from discriminating against anyone for any reason.

"I think social persuasion is more effective at ending discrimination than government coercion," Daniel said.

OK. Then let's repeal drunken driving laws and just proclaim how much we'd prefer people to remain sober when they get behind the wheel.

Let's get rid of the drug laws and just encourage meth dealers to avoid the school yards.

And rather than arresting shoplifters, let's just advise them how terribly, terribly disappointed we are.

Hmmm.

What's the next step?

Passing a voluntary ban on smoking in Lewiston's parks?

CHEERS ... to the voters of Pocatello. By 1 percentage point, they retained the community's ordinance banning discrimination against gays, lesbians, bisexuals and the transgendered.

Seven communities have filled in the gap Idaho lawmakers have left in the state's human rights act.

Vote Yes Pocatello asked ordinary voters to repeal Pocatello's measure. Tuesday, 4,738 said yes; 4,885 said no.

Had it gone the other way, state lawmakers would have had another reason to justify their eight years of obstructionism. A defeat in Pocatello no doubt would have stalled Lewiston's efforts to pass an anti-discrimination ordinance.

Consider the postmortem delivered by Ralph Lillig, who chaired Vote Yes Pocatello: "The people have spoken."

JEERS ... to former Idaho state Sen. Mitch Toryanski, R-Boise. Because of him, you're about to risk entrusting the integrity of Idaho's elections and campaign finance reform laws to former House Speaker Lawrence (Boss) Denney - a man known for extreme partisanship and ethical lapses.

Only 37 percent of Idaho Republicans thought Denney fit for higher office. But in a four-way race for secretary of state, it was good enough to win the GOP nomination.

Everyone could see this train wreck coming. Unable to win, Toryanski could bleed off enough Treasure Valley votes from deputy Ada County Clerk Phil McGrane to hand the nomination to Denney.

Yet Toryanski waved off every entreaty to quit. As predicted, Toryanski came in last Tuesday, but his nearly 21,600 votes came at McGrane's expense.

Now all that stands between Denney and the keys to Secretary of State Ben Ysursa's office is the Democratic nominee - freshman Rep. Holli Woodings of Boise. - M.T.