

## **Read my lips: We do not need more barriers to the marketplace**

**By Wayne Hoffman/Idaho Freedom Foundation**

A least a few times each year, I get to write about some proposal to limit the ability of Idahoans to earn a living in our state. This is one such occasion. And it is especially fun this time, because there is a standard two-word retort for my complaint that this idea goes too far: Nelson Mandela. Yes, that Nelson Mandela.

You see, apparently, a task force advocating for the deaf wants the state Legislature to require sign language interpreters to be licensed.

Supporters of this proposal say it will protect consumers. And when I pry deeper and question how in the world consumers would benefit, out come the words: Nelson Mandela.

You may recall the Mandela funeral, wherein a sign language interpreter did very little interpreting and a whole lot for nonsensical arm flailing instead. That sort of sign language mishap could be avoided, say supporters, if only practitioners were licensed.

I'm not sure if a comparable controversy or incident has occurred in Idaho, but it has in the state of Washington, where observers criticized the sign language interpreter for the Seattle Men's Chorus, whose performance was said to be beautiful, but unclear. The interpreter said the criticism boils down to a difference in style.

That's precisely the concern that Rep. Kathy Sims has about the licensure idea, telling IdahoReporter.com, "different people will do it differently." She said licensure infringes on free speech.

It certainly infringes on the free market. An occupation that requires training but otherwise does not require government oversight suddenly would. Practitioners would be expected to pay for a license and be subject to \$5,000 fines if they break any of the new regulatory board's rules.

According to the Institute for Justice, which tracks licensure rules in the states, only 16 states require sign language interpreters to hold licenses. In the other 34 states, sign language interpreters seem to do interpreting just fine without a license.

But wait: NELSON MANDELA.

Yes, these things happen. I'd say there are a lot more people out there who hopelessly butcher the language in the process of misinterpreting the spoken word, but I'd never suggest that journalists should have to be licensed either.

Kidding aside, unlicensed mechanics, waiters, cooks, tour guides, painters and other workers also screw up from time to time, because of incompetence, lack of training, too little sleep, too much sleep, daydreaming or otherwise, and will continue to do so. Government won't stop it; government will only make it more expensive.

Idaho has a legitimate problem, and it's not unlicensed sign language interpreters. Wages are too low. The government is making it increasingly hard to find a job or start a business. A new type of new regulatory scheme does not help matters.

In the last several years, the state has added licenses for naturopaths, midwifery, driver's license instructors and massage therapists. Last legislative session, lawmakers thankfully rejected a bill to license genetic counselors.

It would be great to go another year without another barrier to the marketplace. If lawmakers can manage that, they will signal that they understand less regulation is actually the kind of sign we all need. I'll be happy to interpret that one for free.