

# Talk, talk, talk

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

JEERS ... to the House State Affairs Committee's Republican majority. Led by Chairman Tom Loertscher, R-Iona, they voted en masse to ignore the pleas of Idaho's marginalized gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered.

By a party-line 13-4 vote, the committee refused to outlaw discrimination on the job, in housing and in public accommodations on the basis of "sexual orientation and gender identity."

What's galling is that these same lawmakers acknowledged the problem exists after hearing three days of testimony from people who have suffered from discrimination.

"... As chairman of this committee and as an Idahoan and as a legislator, I'm calling on the people of this state to stop the cruelty," Loertscher said. "It has no place in our society."

If it has "no place in our society," why did Loertscher vote to permit it?

A former member of the Idaho Human Rights Commission, Rep. Kathy Sims, R-Coeur d'Alene, knows the state has a far better system of resolving discrimination complaints than the ordinances enacted by cities such as her own - which impose criminal penalties.

"... Mediation and compassion can be effective for both sides," Sims said. "But I'm sure that eventually we'll continue to listen and we'll continue to work and the Human Rights Commission will deal with this."

When?

Then there's Rep. Vito Barbieri, R-Dalton Gardens.

"There's no question in my mind that persecution, violence and abuse against the community, or any community, it needs to stop," Barbieri said.

If "it needs to stop," then why vote to keep discrimination legal?

CHEERS ... to former state legislator and lobbyist extraordinaire Bill Roden of Boise. When Roden speaks, people listen.

This week, people listened as Roden stood up for the rights of those sidelined by Idaho society - and urged the House State Affairs Committee to add the words.

Roden knows what he's talking about.

As a co-author of Idaho's first civil rights law in 1961, Roden dispelled the notion that protecting the rights of people based on sexual orientation and gender identity would undermine the religious liberties of others.

Roden appealed to the conscience of a state that embraced tolerance in the past - it was the fourth state to give women the vote and the first to elect a Jewish governor.

And then, like former Gov. Phil Batt two years ago, Roden made it personal.

He shared that a member of his family - his son - is gay.

JEERS ... to Idaho Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra. For weeks, her supporters have promised that her long-awaited presentation before the Legislature's budget panel would dispel doubts raised by a gaffe-prone campaign and a wobbly transition.

Ybarra's appearance Thursday was about 17 minutes long, which left people dumbfounded and underwhelmed:

- Her budget seeks 6.4 percent more money, or about \$14 million less than Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter requested.
- She offered little to resolve the ambiguity over how much money to spend on a new teacher career ladder, tiered licensing program.

"I am asking for \$25 million towards the career ladder - stay tuned for the details," she said.

- Although she's right about steering more money and discretion to individual school districts, Ybarra's advocacy was less than robust.
- She had so little to say that lawmakers, who scheduled two hours for the session, adjourned 90 minutes early.

Do you get the feeling Ybarra is simply going through the motions? Or is she clueless?

CHEERS ... to the cities of Clarkston and Lewiston. Getting past a 5-year-old dispute over Clarkston's ambulance service, the communities are working toward restoring a mutual-aid pact for fire and emergency medical services.

Much of the credit goes to Lewiston Fire Chief Travis Myklebust and Clarkston Fire Chief Steve Cooper.

Artificial political boundaries aside, this is one community. Residents in one end of the valley depend on their neighbors at the other end.

Mutual aid puts all of their interests first.

Clarkston's city council unanimously approved the measure Monday.

JEERS ... to Idaho House Transportation Committee Chairman Joe Palmer, R-Meridian. To bail out Idaho's underfunded highway and bridge network, he would raid Idaho's underfunded public education system.

Five years after he failed to win legislative support for new fuel taxes and registration fees, Gov. Otter presides over a transportation system that falls \$262 million behind each year.

But in the absence of a plan from Otter, Palmer wants to draw millions of dollars generated by sales taxes paid on automotive products.

That's not new money. If spent on transportation, those dollars will be drained from the general fund, which supports public schools, higher education and other government programs.

It's a bad deal for Idaho motorists who are overcharged 26 percent while long-haul truckers are paying 27 percent less than their fair share.

People who live here will continue to pay sales taxes on the automotive products they purchase in Idaho.

Long-haul truckers just passing through aren't likely to stop in Idaho to stock up on tires, batteries and other equipment.

Otter all but promised to veto this kind of scheme. So why is Palmer wasting his time - and yours - promoting it?

JEERS ... to Idaho Republican Party Chairman Steve Yates. Last week, he all but told President Barack Obama to go home during the presidential visit to Boise.

Now he's followed it up with a fundraising letter accusing Obama of coming to Idaho "without meeting with our elected leaders or hearing what the people of Idaho had to say."

Did he fail to notice that Idaho's all-Republican congressional delegation chose to remain in Washington, D.C., last week?

Did he somehow miss Lt. Gov. Brad Little - filling in for a post-operative Otter - welcoming the president to the state?

Did Yates not see the olive branch Obama extended to members of his party?

Yates apparently does not appreciate Idahoans' fine sense of hospitality - even toward a president they did not support. But Yates is a carpetbagger from Maryland. What would you expect? - M.T.