

Bold defiance

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

CHEERS ... to State Sens. Dan Johnson, R-Lewiston, and Dan Schmidt, D-Moscow. Tuesday they stood up against the hegemony of the National Rifle Association.

Not content to force concealed weaponry into every facet of Idaho life, that special interest lobby now wants its own state-issued license plate to benefit "Friends of the NRA."

What's next?

A license plate for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals?

A plate for the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence?

Special recognition for the American Islamic Association?

You've opened Pandora's Box.

The NRA license plate bill steamrolled past the House - winning all but nine of that chamber's 70 members.

But things slowed down a bit in the Senate, where 15 members - 10 Republicans and five Democrats - put themselves on the record opposing this idea. It still cleared the Senate with 18 votes and is headed to Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter's desk.

Johnson and Schmidt were the only two among 21 lawmakers representing the seven counties from the Canadian border to

Adams County who refused to follow the NRA party line.

JEERS ... to state Rep. Sage Dixon, R-Ponderay. Simon Cameron, an industrialist, U.S. senator and Abraham Lincoln's first secretary of war, is credited with observing, "an honest politician is one who, when he is bought, will stay bought."

Which makes Dixon about the most honest politician now roaming the state Capitol.

Less than five weeks into his first legislative session, Dixon is the mastermind behind the "Friends of the NRA" license plate.

"The NRA did support me during the general election, so I thought it was a good start," Dixon told the Spokesman-Review's Betsy Russell.

No need to think.

Just sell your vote to the highest bidder .

Which is great if you happen to be one of the state's most influential lobbies.

If, on the other hand, you happen to be a citizen with nothing more to offer than a vote, you're out in the cold.

JEERS ... to state Rep. Joe Schmick, R-Colfax. Like New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie and U.S. Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., Schmick has a cockeyed notion of public health.

At issue is Rep. June Robinson, D-Everett, who says it's time to stop parents from sending their unimmunized children to public schools because they have a philosophical opposition to vaccinations.

Robinson's bill would lift those exemptions but leave in place a medical waiver.

As long as the country had herd immunity - the idea that enough people were vaccinated to prevent an outbreak if one member of the population contracted the disease - allowing parents this latitude in the health care of their own children was a luxury we could afford.

But years of complacency coupled with allegations that vaccines were tied to autism - a claim even Autism Speaks Chief Science Officer Rob Ring has discredited - have decimated that herd immunity.

Suddenly, the country is seeing a measles outbreak.

Here's the choice: Rebuild that herd immunity - especially to protect people who can't get vaccinated because they have compromised immune systems or are allergic to the vaccine - or reduce the risk of exposure.

Either vaccinate your child or keep him out of the public schools. So says Robinson. So says Gov. Jay Inslee. So says the Washington State Medical Association.

But Schmick told Rachel La Corte of the Associated Press: "I'm not against vaccination. I just think it should be the parent's choice."

How is that not like saying you oppose drunken driving, but would leave it to the individual to decide?

JEERS ... to state Reps. Caroline Nilsson Troy, R-Moscow, and Paul Shepherd, R-Riggins, as well as Sen. Sheryl Nuxoll, R-Cottonwood. Joining such hard-core social conservatives as Reps. Tom Loertscher, R-Iona, Brent Crane, R-Nampa, and Ronald Nate, R-Rexburg, they've declared war on rural Idaho women.

The leader of this crew, Idaho Chooses Life founder David Ripley, won't tell you that. He's characterizing his latest anti-abortion rights bill as "a rather modest piece of legislation."

That's a rather cynical political ploy on Ripley's part.

Neither Ripley nor any member of the Idaho Legislature can stop a woman from exercising her constitutional rights under the U.S. Supreme Court's Roe vs. Wade decision.

Ripley knows that.

He also knows medical advances are enabling women to terminate an early pregnancy - one within the first six weeks - with the use of a prescribed medication, such as RU-486.

Women living in rural communities, however, often access health care by video-conferencing with a doctor in Idaho's urban centers.

Ripley's bill would stop women from getting a prescription through telemedicine - and force them to meet with a physician face to face - but only for this one procedure.

This will not work a hardship on women living in or near Boise and Spokane. But for women living in smaller towns, it will mean carrying their pregnancies longer, when abortions become more difficult and costly.

What makes Nilsson Troy, Shepherd and Nuxoll think it's OK to make rural women Idaho's second-class citizens?

CHEERS ... to Idaho Health and Welfare Director Richard Armstrong. Here he was this week, getting grilled by lawmakers who demanded to know why he was wasting \$1.4 million in state money on child protective cases because the state foregoes federal matching funds.

"Do you think it's something you could pursue?" asked state Rep. Gayle Batt, R-Wilder. "For \$1.4 million, I would think it's something you could work with the attorney general on."

Armstrong is an appointed official who depends on the Legislature for his budget. When a legislator says something ridiculous, he's supposed to hold his tongue.

Not this time.

Not when lawmakers are so caught up in Obama Derangement Syndrome that they refuse to take Medicaid expansion dollars - and impose at least \$173 million in unnecessary taxes during the next decade.

So Armstrong spoke up: "As you know, going after more federal money has been a dicey subject in Idaho and in some cases, it isn't welcomed."

Good for him. - M.T.