

Why should Idaho stop with one offensive plate?

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

Look up the word "maniac" in the dictionary.

Go ahead.

You won't find depictions of well-scrubbed high school football or basketball players.

You'll get a description of someone who has lost control over dark impulses.

A homicidal maniac.

A gambling maniac.

A violent and dangerous person.

A lunatic.

A psychopath.

The good people of Orofino would like you to believe it's a mere coincidence that their choice of a school mascot has nothing to do with the location of State Hospital North in their community.

But state Rep. Paul Shepherd, R-Riggins, wants the Idaho Legislature to place its imprimatur on the whole enterprise.

Shepherd is asking his fellow lawmakers to attach that mascot to a state license plate.

He figures there are enough people willing to put "Friends of Orofino Maniacs" on their automobiles that it will generate some money for the cash-strapped school district to pay for a few extras - such as field trips and scholarships for dual-credit classes.

Of course, it further stigmatizes

Idahoans who are struggling with mental illness - especially in smaller communities where the act of seeking help is more difficult to conceal.

Idaho's suicide rate has continued to hover at the nation's seventh highest.

The number of people in crisis has risen alarmingly. In five years, protective holds jumped 45 percent to 5,432. During the same period, the number of civil commitments increased 25 percent to 1,083.

Admissions at State Hospital South in Blackfoot are up 67.4 percent to 608.

Yet no state spends less helping people in trouble. In 2010, the last year available, Idaho provided \$36.64 per capita on community-based mental health programs. The national average was \$120.56.

Idaho already has 50 of these specialty license plates and if Shepherd is willing to lower the standards for compassion and good taste to this degree, why stop?

As long as we're into license plates that make people cringe, Shepherd ought to consider sponsoring the following:

- Idaho - Kill a wolf for Christ.
- Boise State University - At least our team can play football.
- University of Idaho - At least our fans went to school here.
- Idaho - If you're gay, stay away.
- Idaho - Elect a plagiarist. We did.
- Northern Idaho - Former home of the Aryan Nations.
- Southern Idaho - Headquarters of the Flat Earth Society.
- Idaho - Proud parent of unvaccinated grade-schooler.
- Idaho - We train our dogs, not our workers.
- Idaho - Dumb and getting dumber.
- Idaho senators - Cruising airport rest rooms since 1983.