

# The Bedke Rule is a surrender document

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

Idaho House Speaker Scott Bedke didn't have enough House Republicans to approve a state-based health insurance exchange two years ago. So he formed a coalition with the House Democrats.

It worked. The measure passed. But it ignited what Idaho Attorney General Lawrence Wasden dubbed "a fight, really, for the heart and soul of the Republican Party."

Up and down the 2014 GOP primary ballot, hard-core conservatives challenged mainstream conservatives.

The mainstream won.

Gov. C.L (Butch) Otter beat back a challenge from former Sen. Russ Fulcher, R-Meridian.

With a handful of exceptions in the Panhandle and eastern Idaho, the lawmakers who backed the exchange prevailed.

Opposition to Bedke - who won his tenuous hold on leadership by becoming the first speaker to oust his predecessor, then-Rep. and now Secretary of State Lawrence (Boss) Denney - evaporated.

So why has Bedke apparently signed the articles of surrender?

You get that impression looking over the column the Tribune's William L. Spence wrote Thursday. In it, he details how the Republican caucus is now operating under a variation of the Hastert rule.

That refers to former U.S. House Speaker Dennis Hastert's mantra that no bill will reach the floor for a vote unless half the GOP congressional membership agrees.

What you ended up with was a Tea Party contingent running the show. Members such as Idaho's Raul Labrador maneuvered the House into closing the federal government, threatening to default on the national debt or possibly shutting down the Department of Homeland Security.

But what could be called the Bedke Rule is even harsher. Under it, you'd need a majority of the 56 Idaho House Republicans - or 36 votes - not merely to bring a bill to the floor but to pass it.

That goes against Idaho history, when coalitions of Democrats and Republicans passed school budgets, raised taxes and approved public works spending.

By freezing out the 14 House Democrats, Bedke all but guarantees 78,000 working poor Idahoans will not get Medicaid coverage. Idahoans will pay twice to provide medical care to the poor - first in federal Medicaid taxes that go to other states, then in Idaho state and local taxes to support medically indigent programs. They'll also pay more insurance premiums to cover medical bills for others that go unpaid.

The Bedke rule goes a long way toward explaining why the Legislature has gone eight weeks without producing a consensus on transportation funding.

But it guarantees no more Republican civil wars.

"I want as many votes as possible, (but) I'd really like to have a majority of our caucus," House Transportation Committee Chairman Joe Palmer, R-Meridian, told Spence. "We've seen a lot of hard feelings here the last few years. I'd prefer not to add to that."

That's not to say Bedke's wing of the party wouldn't win the next primary campaign if House Republicans extended health care coverage to the working poor or approved a modest fuel tax increase.

Polling shows 61 percent of Idahoans support Medicaid expansion. Among Republicans, 53 percent are for it.

With gas prices down, employment up and a growing anxiety about aging, fragile bridges, it's hard to believe a modest gas tax increase will cause any kind of a political hiccup.

But it's work to raise money and garner votes to fight off primary challenges from the right. Could it be that Bedke's team would rather capitulate and not go to the trouble? - M.T.