

# Evil? Stupid? No, these politicians are chicken

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

Forty years ago, then Idaho 2nd District Congressman George V. Hansen faced two years in prison because he had violated campaign finance laws.

Instead, U.S. District Judge George Hart asked aloud the question that has dogged students of Idaho politicians for some time: Is he evil or merely stupid?

"I assumed when I sentenced him to jail he was evil," Hart said. "Now I am not so sure. Stupid, surely."

All of which brings to mind the events surrounding Monday's special legislative session in Boise.

U.S. Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, was neither evil nor stupid when he assured a Boise talk radio program's audience he supported the nine House Judiciary and Rules Committee members who last month blocked Idaho's compliance with the Uniform Interstate Family Support Act.

Although favored by the anti-federalist wing of the GOP, that measure's demise meant Idaho would lose federal funding and access to federal databases, undermining the state's ability to enforce child support payments to some 183,000 kids.

So Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter called lawmakers back to Boise to pass the bill. After an 11-hour marathon, it cleared the House 49-21 and the Senate 33-2.

"I think these nine legislators should be given credit for doing their jobs and for picking out problems with a piece of federal legislation that should not have been put into place," Crapo said. "The fact that they needed to get this fixed and do it right and not to let the federal government coerce the state of Idaho or to let federal law coerce the state of Idaho is something commendable."

Later, the state's senior Republican clarified that he was not commenting "on the state legislation and its merits, and he does not oppose it. He does support strong, coordinated child support enforcement, both domestic and international."

House Speaker Scott Bedke, R-Oakley, was neither evil nor stupid when he said - with a straight face - that taxpayers got a bargain because the anticipated \$40,000 special session was cheaper than dealing with the bill while lawmakers were still assembled back in April. Staying in Boise to deal with this issue would have taken days and tens of thousands of dollars, he said.

Of course, had Bedke listened to Rep. John Rusche, D-Lewiston, he could have settled the issue with a floor vote - within a matter of hours before adjourning for the year.

In Monday's session, the 7th Legislative District delegation representing Clearwater, Idaho, Bonner and Shoshone counties was neither evil nor stupid when it abandoned 5,344 children within that district who depend on child support enforcement.

That's one of every five Idaho County kids.

In Clearwater County, it's one in four.

Yet Sen. Sheryl Nuxoll, R-Cottonwood, along with Reps. Shannon McMillan, R-Silverton, and Paul Shepherd, R-Riggins, jeopardized Idaho's child support collection system.

This is not evil.

This is not stupidity.

This is cowardice.

No, they're not afraid of the kids, nor their 233,000 parents and guardians - or even the thousands of other friends and relatives.

These parents, guardians, friends and relatives don't vote - or if they do, they limit their involvement to a general election and typically vote Republican.

What scares the snot out of the politicians is the small army of ideologically driven, low-information and sloganeering-susceptible voters who show up at the closed Republican primary election.

The people who rely on conservative talk radio.

The ones who hear the phrases "Sharia law" or anything "Obama" and revert to an anti-federal crouch.

The voters who take as gospel the Idaho Freedom Foundation's skewed Freedom Index of legislative votes and begin tossing out political pejoratives such as RINO, liberal or "ultra-leftist."

"Money, in politics, is often accused of buying power," Rep. Luke Malek, R-Coeur d'Alene, wrote last week. "However, fear can be just as corruptive. Ironically, this group that has named itself 'Freedom' holds policymakers hostage. For some, fear of voting against a ranking from the Freedom Foundation is crippling."

Somehow, this image of politicians so intimidated by the Tea Party, Idaho Freedom Foundation and conservative talk radio that they're willing to sacrifice the well-being of 183,000 kids makes one pine for the good old days.

At least then, it was a choice between no brains or no conscience. - M.T.

