

# Why pay for their mistake? Send them a bill

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

In about two weeks, Idaho's 105 legislators will reassemble for a special session.

Bringing these lawmakers to Boise and then paying for their lodging and meals works out to \$31,000 a day.

Add to that the indirect costs of legislative staff - people who draw up bills, research issues, work on budgets, provide clerical services and keep the formal machinery of the House and Senate operating.

Don't forget Statehouse security and the members of the executive branch - from the governor's office, the attorney general and the Department of Health and Welfare - who must prepare for the session and assist lawmakers.

The value of that work - and the projects left unattended while they're preoccupied with the lawmakers - works out to about another \$10,000 a day.

Think of what that kind of money could buy.

A Ford F-150 pickup truck.

A school teacher's salary for a year.

A couple of full-ride scholarships at the University of Idaho.

Two months of treatment for a mentally ill patient.

Housing a state prisoner for a year.

A good share of the cost of hiring a wildlife biologist who is assigned to restoring deer and elk herds.

Even eight months of Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter's housing allowance.

Special sessions are rare in Idaho. There have been six of them since Jimmy Carter was in the White House.

Lawmakers returned to Boise usually because of unforeseen circumstances.

When the federal government cut off revenue sharing in 1980, lawmakers had to find a new source of money for Medicaid. The following year required a special session to reapportion the Legislature. Two years later, a flawed drunken driving bill demanded immediate surgery.

In 1992, congressional action opened the door to casino gambling at the state's Indian reservations. Lawmakers blocked it with an amendment to the state constitution.

In 2000, a federal court decision threatened Idaho's cheap electrical rates unless legislators responded.

And in 2006, lawmakers confronted newly installed interim Gov. Jim Risch's ambition to call them back to Boise to pass his tax shift scheme, which would later prove devastating to public schools.

That's far from the case here.

This added expense of a special session was entirely avoidable.

As the regular session was winding down last month, it became clear a slight majority of the House Judiciary and Rules Committee was about to block a bill bringing Idaho's child support enforcement system into compliance with federal law.

Without that bill, the state would lose the \$16 million in federal money needed to support that program.

More vitally, Idaho could no longer use the federal databases needed to track down non-custodial parents for payment. That left at risk 183,000 children who rely on getting \$205 million.

There was plenty of warning.

Two days before lawmakers went home, reporters were writing about it.

With plenty of time to spare, Health and Welfare Director Dick Armstrong sounded the alarm.

In the final hours, House Democratic Leader John Rusche of Lewiston made three attempts to rescue the dying the bill.

Yet lawmakers went home, leaving a mess in Boise that now requires their attention.

Why should Idaho taxpayers shell out money for the do-over.

Here's who should pay:

- Rep. Vito Barbieri, R-Dalton Gardens, who organized a seminar with anti-Muslim activist Shahram Hadian and infected a dozen lawmakers with the idea that the child support law would subject Idaho citizens to Sharia Law.
- Sen. Sheryl Nuxoll, R-Cottonwood, who fell under Hadian's spell and transmitted it to the House Judiciary and Rules Committee.
- Idaho Freedom Foundation President Wayne Hoffman, whose organization joined Nuxoll in lobbying for the bill's demise.

- The Judiciary and Rules Committee Nine who blocked the bill. Among them were Reps. Lynn Luker, R-Boise, who painted the bill as a violation of due process; Janet Trujillo, R-Idaho Falls, who passed Luker's argument off as her own in a plagiarized newspaper column; Ron Nate, R-Rexburg, who urged Idaho to put state sovereignty ahead of the interests of children; and Shannon McMillan of Silverton, who once again cast a dangerous vote without explanation.
- Congressman Raul Labrador, R-Idaho, who supported Luker's position.
- House Speaker Scott Bedke, R-Oakley, who waved off Rusche's attempts and instead decided to send lawmakers home.

Send the bill to Bedke, Nuxoll, Luker and their colleagues in care of their legislative offices at:

- P.O. Box 83720

Boise, ID 83720.

Labrador should ante up, too.

Reach him at:

- Longworth House Office Building, Room 1523

Washington, D.C., 20515.

Hoffman shouldn't get off scot-free, either.

Send him a bill at:

- 2404 Bank Drive, Ste. 314

Boise, ID 83705. - M.T.