

# Is Idaho's Mr. Freedom having second thoughts?

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

Try finding a more compelling story of freedom in action than what transpired in McCall this month.

Some residents of that resort city live in a country - and a state - that has forgotten them. They earn a minimum wage that has been stuck at \$7.25 an hour for the better part of a decade.

No one is looking out for them. Idaho is a state with one of the highest percentage of minimum-wage jobs in the country and the lowest per capita incomes.

These are not teenagers taking home some spare cash. About 88 percent of people earning this wage are at least 20 years old - and 55 percent are working full time. One of every three minimum-wage workers is a parent.

Had Congress or the Legislature updated it, the wage already would be about \$10.60 an hour. Instead, anyone else making a decent living is kicking in - with food stamps, rent checks and health care - to keep those families afloat. In other words, they are subsidizing minimum-wage businesses.

Among Idaho's neighbors, Washington set its minimum wage at \$9.47 - and Seattle has pledged to raise its minimum wage to \$15 an hour within seven years. Oregon is not too far behind with a minimum wage of \$9.25.

So the citizens of McCall banded together, circulated petitions and submitted to voters the idea of taking matters into their own hands.

Under an initiative they placed on the Nov. 3 election ballot, McCall's minimum wage would rise to \$8.75 on Jan. 1, then to \$10.25 the following year, and it would be indexed for inflation thereafter.

This is becoming part of a pattern. With Idaho's Legislature paralyzed by right-wing ideology, cities are acting on their own. Look over the list of Idaho communities - including Lewiston and Moscow - that have taken steps to ensure the rights of gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people.

But on Election Day, McCall's initiative failed, 470 to 409.

Now if you're among those who fear the minimum wage would cut into profit margins, drive away businesses or even result in fewer jobs, you'd have to say the system prevailed.

Unless, of course, you're Idaho Freedom Foundation President Wayne Hoffman.

When it comes to freedom in McCall, last week's minimum wage vote was too close for Hoffman's comfort. Actually, if he had his way, no state or even the federal government would impose any minimum wage. But Hoffman has enough like-minded friends in Idaho's Legislature that he can count on them never advancing the state's wage one cent higher than the national minimum.

So he wants them to close down the option.

"Advocates for this absurd policy are likely to keep pressing local governments - or their voters - to say yes," Hoffman wrote in his newspaper column last week. "Eventually, there will be some kind of piecemeal win, unless lawmakers put a stop to the madness."

Isn't this the same Hoffman who has made it his life's mission to keep the heavy hand of government off people's backs?

Isn't this the same ardent foe of the federal government sticking its nose into the affairs of Idaho?

The same fellow who argued so passionately against imposing federal health care reform on the Gem State?

Yet, here comes Hoffman, demanding that Big Brother from Boise stop the people of McCall - or for that matter Lewiston, Moscow or Orofino - from making their own decisions.

That's the voice of someone who considers himself superior to the voters.

Hardly what you'd expect from a champion of freedom, is it? - M.T.