

## **Idaho lawmaker denies illegally possessing elk**

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI, Associated Press

MOUNTAIN HOME, Idaho (AP) — Idaho Rep. Pete Nielsen of Mountain Home has been charged with poaching an elk in southwest Idaho.

The Republican lawmaker entered a not guilty plea to possessing illegal wildlife on Wednesday in 4th District Magistrate Court. Nielsen opted to represent himself rather than hire an attorney.

According to court documents, officers with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game cited Nielsen for illegal possession of a spike elk in Elmore County — roughly 40 miles east of Boise — on Dec. 29. Officials say Nielsen's hunting license only permitted legally killing an antlerless elk.

A Fish and Game spokesman declined to comment because the case is still ongoing.

If found guilty, the maximum penalty includes a \$1,000 fine, up to six months of jail time and hunting privileges suspended for one to two years.

"I'm embarrassed, to say the least," Nielsen told Magistrate Judge George Hicks on Wednesday.

Hunting is a popular sport in Idaho largely due to its robust wilderness areas throughout the state. However, state officials regularly encourage residents to report possible poaching incidents at the beginning of hunting seasons. On average, the Idaho nonprofit Citizens Against Poaching receives 600 calls on reported poaching, which result in about 150 citations and \$20,000 paid in fines, each year.

Nielsen, who was accompanied by his wife in court, declined to comment further to The Associated Press.

Hicks granted Nielsen's request to delay his court dates until the 2016 Idaho Legislature adjourns so as not to interrupt his duties a legislator. Nielsen is

tentatively scheduled to reappear in early April depending if the session is done by then.

"I appreciate your hard work on behalf of your constituents in Elmore County and the district," Hicks said.

The 77-year-old Nielsen has served in the Idaho Statehouse since 2002. Known as a far right conservative, Nielsen sits as vice-chair on the House Education Committee. He has never been appointed to oversee a legislative committee nor won a legislative leadership position.

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