

# 'Toxic paternalism' lurks under Capitol dome

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

Poor state Rep. Heather Scott, R-Blanchard.

Seems like she can't get a break.

There she was last week, trying to put the moribund Idaho Women's Commission out of existence.

It shouldn't take much. The commission, never budgeted at more than \$30,000, hasn't received a dime in the seven years since former Sen. Joyce Broadsword, R-Sagle, got its funding eliminated.

All that's required now is a simple bill to repeal the 1970s-era legislation that created the women's commission in the first place.

"It's kind of outdated," Scott said. "I just don't think women need a commission to promote themselves."

Unfortunately for Scott, her bill emerged at about the same time her fellow Republican, Rep. Pete Nielsen of Mountain Home, dished out just the latest dose of the "toxic paternalism" Idaho women have had to endure.

In the midst of a committee hearing about requiring abortion clinics to issue to their patients a list of ultrasound operators who typically oppose abortion rights, Nielsen had this to say: "Now, I'm of the understanding that in many cases of rape, it does not involve any pregnancy because of the trauma of the incident. That may be true with incest a little bit."

He kept at it: "It doesn't happen as often as it does with consensual sex, because of the trauma involved. ... That's information that I've had through the years. Whether it's totally accurate or not, I don't know. In a rape situation, there's a lot of trauma (which can prevent pregnancy). That doesn't mean it will. I believe that's the case."

Science did not dissuade Nielsen. As the Spokesman-Review's Betsy Russell noted, a 2003 study in the scientific journal *Human Nature* found that rape victims were more likely to become pregnant by a "sizable margin."

Nor would politics. Former Congressman Todd Akin, R-Mo., became a has-been instead of a U.S. senator because he opined that women who are victims of what he called "legitimate rape" rarely get pregnant.

Only after suffering a deluge of criticism from across the country did Nielsen concede he might have made an error. But he's just one serial offender among many.

In 2003, the Mountain Home Republican chastised a bill meant to protect a mother's right to breast-feed her baby in public as something that would encourage women to "whip it out and do it anywhere."

Among his fellow travelers is state Rep. Vito Barbieri, R-Dalton Gardens. Last year, Barbieri asked if a woman could swallow a pill containing a miniature camera " ... in a pregnancy? Swallowing a camera and helping the doctor determine what the situation is?"

Replied Dr. Julie Madsen: "It cannot be done in a pregnancy, simply because when you swallow a pill, it would not end up in the vagina."

Said Barbieri: "Fascinating. That certainly makes sense, doctor."

Four years ago, Sen. Chuck Winder, R-Boise, wanted to subject women seeking abortions to mandatory ultrasounds. Stung by criticism that his bill made no exception for victims of rape, incest or women in a medical emergency, Winder argued back: "I would hope that when a woman goes in to a physician with a rape issue, that physician will indeed ask her about perhaps her marriage, was this pregnancy caused by normal relations in a marriage or was it truly caused by a rape?"

And a few years before that, Rep. Tom Loertscher, R-Iona, helped kill stronger regulations to safeguard children in day care facilities because - he said - those kids should not be in day care in the first place.

"What can we do to keep mom at home?" said Loertscher, who added he "cannot imagine" ever taking a child to a day care center.

Detect any pattern here?

How about a collection of older men imposing laws on women - without the slightest idea of what they're doing?

Don't you think these codgers might benefit enormously from an Idaho Women's Commission with resources robust enough to fill in the chasms in their knowledge? - M.T.