

State board's booze policy gives you the spins

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

If hooliganism had invaded home football games at Idaho's public institutions of higher learning, you might better understand the State Board of Education's reticence toward the imbibing of intoxicants at these events.

And if the state board members themselves embraced a blanket ban on booze at all places, on all occasions and for everyone, you could at least recognize a coherent policy.

Instead, confusion reigns.

Beginning in June, the board voted 7-1 to end a one-year-old pilot project allowing the University of Idaho and Boise State University to sell alcohol at home games. At both the Huddle at BSU's Albertson Stadium and the Fan Zone at the UI's Kibbie Dome, fans who purchased a general admission ticket and were at least 21 could buy a beer - until the state board ended it.

The one hold-out against that vote, former Idaho National Laboratory deputy director David Hill of Boise, asked why the state board was in such a hurry to act before more evidence was in.

Left in place, however, was a rather elitist notion. While the casual fan could no longer purchase a drink, the state board continued a long-standing policy of selling booze to people who can afford a season ticket and invest in suite seats or have an in with corporate sponsors.

For the people enjoying BSU's Stueckle Sky Center or the UI's Lighthouse Center and Bud and June Ford Club room, that was good news.

But for the people enjoying tailgating parties out in the parking lot, more bad news was to come. Last week, on a 4-4 tied vote, the state board effectively nixed alcohol at those venues as well.

Curious, isn't it?

The idea of allowing a university to control where booze is sold - and who can purchase it - had only one state board member behind it.

A comparative free-for-all at tailgating parties got four state board members' support.

But what would you expect?

Look at the way Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter has filled that board. Otter gets to pick seven of the eight state board members. State schools Superintendent Sherri Ybarra holds the eighth seat by virtue of her elective office rather than gubernatorial appointment.

Thanks to Otter, no one on that board lives on the Palouse - or even north central Idaho. The governor chose to replace Bill Goesling of Moscow with Albertsons executive Andrew Scoggin of Boise. So for the first time in 25 years, there is no Latah County voice on that panel.

Someone living in Moscow or its vicinity these past years would better understand the region's prevailing attitude toward alcohol. He'd also have more than a passing awareness of the proactive steps the UI has taken to curb excessive drinking, especially by students who are underage.

In fact, Otter has named only two graduates of Idaho's public colleges and universities to set policy for those institutions.

Emma Atchley of Ashton earned a bachelor's degree from the UI and a master's degree from Claremont Graduate School in California.

Linda Clark of Meridian earned her bachelor's degree from BSU, a master's from the UI and a doctorate from the University of San Francisco.

Of the remaining five Otter appointees who attended out-of-state schools, three are products of Utah institutions. Members Debbie Critchfield of Oakley and Scoggin graduated from the Mormon church-owned Brigham Young University at Provo, Utah. Scoggin also earned his law degree at BYU. Richard Westerberg of Preston attended state schools in Utah.

Hill earned his bachelor's at Imperial College, London University and completed an MBA at the University of Chicago.

Don Soltman of Twin Lakes earned his bachelor's at the U.S. Air Force Academy and his master's from Baylor University in Texas.

Ybarra is a graduate of West Liberty State College in West Virginia. She has completed a master's and an educational specialist degree from the UI - where she is also pursuing a doctorate.

With Critchfield, Scoggin and Westerberg casting a solid three votes against alcohol on campus, all they need is one ally. They found it in Clark.

Atchley, Hill, Soltman and Ybarra voted to continue drinking at tailgating parties.

No wonder the state board has no thought-out drinking policy. These people are voting their values. - M.T.